



A View from the Sixties:

**The Black Experience in  
Southeastern Connecticut**



A Memoir  
**Linwood W. Bland, Jr.**

Born in North Carolina, Linwood W. Bland, Jr. went with his family, at an early age, to live in New London, Connecticut. After three years of high school he went into the segregated Navy, serving in World War II. He returned to New London only to be called into the Navy again in the Korean conflict.

After his second tour of duty in the Navy, Bland returned again to New London. A veteran of two wars, he nevertheless encountered discrimination in his search for employment, a common experience for blacks. He also became aware of efforts in the black community to bring about change. In September 1956 the New London NAACP was formed. Driven to take action to remedy lack of employment opportunities and housing discrimination that blacks faced daily, Bland joined the NAACP, became involved in the activities of the organization, and in the late 1950s became a member of the Executive Board.

In 1962 Bland was elected president of the New London NAACP. Across the country civil rights groups were on the move and Bland was eager not to be on the sidelines as historic events were taking place. At the same time he had to face the very real fears of others who thought they might lose their jobs or suffer other reprisals. While taking an activist role in fighting for the rights of his people, Bland also had to address differences among members of the black community, not all of whom supported activism. Nevertheless, under his leadership, the NAACP became more involved in the struggle for equality, leading marches and initiating court cases to protest employment discrimination. During his tenure, many claims of discrimination in housing, employment, in the schools, on the job, were brought to the attention of the NAACP and acted on. Frequently difficult decisions had to be made, such as in 1963, when the NAACP decided to confront employment discrimination at Electric Boat, a major national defense contractor and the area's largest employer.

Linwood Bland served as president of the New London NAACP from 1962 through 1968, the year Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated, a turbulent and significant time in the history of race relations in this country.



To Tommy, a good friend.

My book of revelations is just  
for you. God bless you always.

Linwood W. Bland Jr.  
3-2001

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The Black Experience in  
Southeastern Connecticut

A Memoir by

Linwood W. Bland, Jr.

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# Foreword

For those of us who lived through the Nineteen Sixties, particularly those who were just entering or were in early adulthood, it was a decade of turbulence and excitement, one of eager anticipation and stunned disappointment, great joy and extreme sorrow. To this writer it seems like it happened only yesterday on the one hand. On the other hand, in spirit and ambience, that decade seems as remote as the Pleistocene Epoch. ,

No group of people experienced the stirring Sixties more deeply than did minorities, particularly African Americans. It was a decade of major efforts finally to achieve true equality in this country. Great Civil Rights movements began. Segregation in the South was attacked as were the more subtle, and thus more invidious, forms of racism in the North. There were successes. There were failures. The decade saw three horrible assassinations: John F. Kennedy, our President; his brother Robert F. Kennedy, a candidate for the office of President, and the great civil rights leader the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Civil rights issues were contested throughout the country. In the big cities and in the small ones wherever courageous people, black or white, were willing to step forward. And this is the story of those brave people who did step forward in New London County told by one of the African American leaders of that tumultuous decade, Linwood W. Bland, Jr.

As you will learn by reading this memoir, Mr. Bland and his colleagues in the New London NAACP Branch braved much and accomplished much. You will also learn from this book, that while a lot was achieved, more, unhappily, remains to be done. As recently as 2001, the year of publication for this book, racism raised its ugly head in the City of New London Police Department eerily confirming some of Mr. Bland's conclusions.

Mr. Bland tells it as he saw it or remembers it with a simple direct candor. Despite being a victim of bias and prejudice, he does not reflect hostility and, indeed, courageously notes that discrimination, while mainly a black-white issue in this country, is not solely a black-white issue, and that blacks as well as whites can harbor ill feelings for their own.

The courageous efforts of Mr. Bland and his associates did not completely succeed in attaining true equality and respect for all regardless of race, gender, or creed. Perhaps that is an unattainable, impossible dream. Nonetheless as the lyrics say, people who dare to dream the impossible dream and to fight for what they believe is right make the world a better place for us all. This is the story of their fight in Southeastern Connecticut.

The Historical Society's mission is to publish significant documents and preserve artifacts so that our descendants will be aware of their history and can learn from it.

Neild B. Oldham, President  
New London County Historical Society  
January 15, 2001



# Prologue

I have attempted to put together something of value to society; something that the present and future generations—black and white—can grasp and understand. But to grasp and understand in a positive manner requires caring because if one does not care, there can be little understanding. That is particularly true with racism. My views on racism come from years of daily, unending, personal experiences. When one discovers the same pattern occurring over and over again, there can be only one solid conclusion. Racism, the nightmare which blacks have had to endure, follows a continuing pattern. Some will argue that racism doesn't exist and never has existed. I believe those who hold that opinion are like those who think the Holocaust in the era of Nazi Germany is the figment of someone's imagination. But people are entitled to think what they want, regardless of how distasteful. I personally think many racial animosities could have ended with the Civil War. But Southerners decided on a policy to exclude black citizens creating an atmosphere of mistrust. I think it would have been far easier to include, rather than exclude. But it didn't happen that way. If it had, I wouldn't be writing in anger about it.

But there is another pressing issue that has plagued me for a long, long time. That issue, also a form of racism and foremost in my mind, is one of the most blatant idiosyncrasies affecting blacks. It has been with us as long as racism. For a solution, I will leave that problem in the hands of psychologists and psychiatrists, and hope that somehow we can bring the practice to a screeching halt. The oddity is the odious contention among blacks, concerning blackness. I refer to it as black jealousy. It is a topic that has to be aired in public and not continued to be concealed in private conversations. It seems to me, that problem, which may be attributed to the institution of slavery, or maybe further back than that, is at the heart of what I call a double dose of evil. Racism and black jealousy are almost on equal footing, with the former leading the pack. Attempting to overcome one is difficult enough without having to deal with the other. I have to wonder which will be the first to disappear?

I have named several who were victims of a double dose of evil, which begins with my father, and ends with Wallace McKissick. But they were not unique to the practice. That's another reason why I write in anger. Looking back over my lifetime, and recollecting the ugliness of those racisms, I want to be blunt and not soften the blow. I grew up in an era where, from a black man's point of view, color meant practically everything. That is why my chest swells whenever I see the blackest of blacks making it or having made it. I am reminded of my father, light-skinned, but no smarter than a thoroughbred black, becoming the first bartender of color at the Mohican Hotel. And Ralph Hannon, another light-skinned black man, becoming my father's assistant. I am knocking neither my father nor Hannon. They had to work too. But so did the ultra-black person. But most discrimination has no barriers. Even though my father and Hannon were light-skinned, as evidence by one of Hannon's experiences related in this book, neither was exempt from discrimination. That's why I write in anger.

I think there are very few people who know the depths of racism. I have read many publications pertaining to life in this section of Connecticut. Many of those publications tell the story of area life from a white point of view. I have attempted to tell the story

from my point of view. Although it may have its shortcomings, I believe the average reader will get a vivid view of area life from where I have been sitting.

There is another area of black life touched upon in this publication. That is the area of private employment, which was a problem nationally and not limited to Connecticut. That was one of the things, except the military, of which it has been noted that I felt compelled not to be involved in unless it was on a voluntary basis. That was in the area of forced servitude. I use being unmarried as an excuse. I had no one depending on me to have to accept the jobs of waiter or bus boy as a means of livelihood. Unfortunately, many others, to support their families, had to bend to the times. That is not a knock upon them because of what they were forced to do. In fact, praise should be heaped upon them for preparing themselves for any eventuality. No one told them it was a fact that times would change and barriers would fall during their lifetimes. But it is all about getting the opportunity. Others prepared themselves educationally for the future, but were gone before the change came.

And others who also prepared themselves were around to meet the challenge when the change came. I am very thankful to have been around when the change came and saw those such as Norma Suggs Albright go from the traditional, black house-cleaning female in the early years to New London's first black Director of Welfare in the later years. I also witnessed Albert Garvin, Jr., going from bus boy to claims representative with the Social Security Administration; Russell Fields going from waiting tables to a topflight carpenter; and Wallace McKissick going from waiting tables to teaching biology and science at New London High School. There have had to be hundreds in this area of Connecticut who moved from menial jobs forced on them by their color, to well-paying, dignified, and professional ones. All of those individuals deserve a story written about them and their courageousness.

But before I get into what this publication is attempting to reveal, I will try to ease the minds of some who found a 1994 incident appalling. I am speaking of black feelings in regard to the O.J. Simpson not guilty verdict. It could be a valuable lesson to those who thought blacks were condoning and sanctioning the murders of two white people.

If a person, non-black, could walk in a black man's shoes, he or she would know why the reactions of blacks to the Simpson verdict seemed the opposite of that of whites. The non-black person would have known that blacks were neither condoning nor sanctioning those horrible crimes. What blacks were exhibiting was a sense of relief for all of those unfortunate blacks who had been murdered by whites. Those whites who had committed those murders were found not guilty, freed by hung juries or were never charged with the crime. Specifically, I am referring to the murders of Emmett Till, the Reverend George Lee and Lamar Smith, Vernon Dahmer, Medgar Evers, Chaney, Schwemer, and Goodman, all in Mississippi, and the four young girls blown to bits in 1963 in the 16th Street Baptist Church, in Birmingham, Alabama. The list is long, and most of those murders are ingrained in the memories of blacks.

So I thought it was shameful how a television network, with TV cameras stationed in strategic spots around the country, as soon as the Simpson verdicts were announced, showed the reactions of blacks and whites. And those reactions went into every home that was tuned to that network. And, as a result, polarization set in.



As for me growing up below and above the Mason-Dixon Line, somehow I feel I was short-changed. But mine is not about jealousy. It is about reality. Those who grew up with me were also victims. We came along when no black history was taught where it should have been taught. It really was no one's fault, but that feeling of being shortchanged has been with me for a long time. I never went to a movie in the South where I could see black actresses and actors. In fact, I never went to any movie while growing up in the South. My first experience with the black type of picture show was in the North where I viewed a movie called "Green Pastures."

When I came to New London at an early age, I was exposed to cultures of the area. If I went to the movies, I had a steady diet of white stars. If our radio was powerful enough, we could listen to many radio stations, all geared to white listeners. Sunday mornings, on radio stations, blacks were treated to the spiritual singing groups of "Wings Over Jordan" and "The Southernaires." And weekly or monthly, blacks had the pleasure of listening to programs named "The Negro Achievement Hour" and "The Negro Arts Program."

I had a nice collection of 45 and 78 rpm records in an era where race played a tremendous part in everyday broadcasting. Those were the days when very few radio stations dared to air secular black music. In that era, black artists recorded on labels referred to as "Race Records." Only a few, such as The Nat King Cole Trio recording of "Straighten Up and Fly Right," The Ink Spots, The Mills Brothers, and maybe Ella Fitzgerald, were often heard over the airwaves. Black female artists, such as Billie Holiday, Ruth Brown, Sarah Vaughn, and Dinah Washington were rarely heard. Black male artists, such as Herb Jeffries, Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson, Illinois Jacquet, Louis Jordan, Eddie Prysock, Al Hibbler, Big Joe Turner, Billy Eckstein, and Ivory Joe Hunter were also seldom heard.

It wasn't until I went into the armed forces, and also attained adulthood, that I was able to see those black artists "Live and in Color." I was fortunate enough to be stationed in the New York City area and visited the Apollo Theater to see all of those famous artists. For some reason, I never went to the Savoy Ballroom to join with the "Hip Cats" at dances there. But that is the era in which I grew up.

Although I retained most of my southern drawl, I discarded words such as "premy" (presently), "yonder" (there), "tolable" (tolerable), and "chunk" (throw). I attended schools in North Carolina and Connecticut. After three years of high school, I went into the segregated Navy. It was not voluntary on my part. As a result, I have two honorable discharges, after having served hitches in two wars, World War II and the Korean conflict. After Korea, I involved myself in a home study program. Then I took a course in radio and TV repair, which led to "Lenny's," my after work, part-time business. Then there was Bland's Restaurant. My mother ran that business. She was the cook. All the while, I maintained my steady job at Schaller Motors. Schaller Motors was a garage in which I ran the front section, which included the gas station, lube room, and car wash operation. Schaller retired four years after I began working for him. Eventually, I went to work for Roger Motors for another four years. Roger was Henry Schaller's son. After that, I worked three years in the building and road construction trade. Then, beginning in 1962, I was in the Sullivan Motors building for another thirteen years and beginning in 1975, I was employed at Girard Toyota for another two years. My last job was working as an outside machinist at Electric Boat, retiring after seventeen years with that company.

During the time I had my TV business, I became involved in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. That involvement took place near mid-century. I believe an incident in school in the 1930s (see Chapter One ) motivated my later actions on being involved in that civil rights organization.

I was an activist. Heaven only knows what would have happened to me if I hadn't joined the NAACP when I did. Things were happening around the country as they had never happened before. There was the beginning of a movement that many blacks only dreamed of, but never thought would occur during their lifetime. It was a drive to remove the shackles of racial segregation and discrimination from this nation.

And I was fortunate enough to be a part of that movement. I was well aware that my involvement greatly concerned some members and non-members of my family. But my activist leanings could not be suppressed. Therefore, some of those activities of this area of the state are pulled together to enlighten those who are unaware of that history. Others, remembering those historical activities of the 1960s, served as reminders of problems which would not disappear. One such reminder was an incident that occurred thirty years later. It involved the police, and it focused on one of the reasons why blacks have very little faith in those who are paid to "protect and serve."

In that 1990s incident, a black woman who had been involved in an automobile accident brought the problem to light. At the scene of the accident, the investigating officer assured the lady that she was blameless and she could get a copy of his report in a couple of days. She called me after she had reviewed the report. Contrary to what she had been told, the report blamed her for the accident. I went to the accident scene. There was no way, from the officer's description, the lady could have been at fault. I went to the police station and presented the undeniable facts to a police captain. From that visit, two changes took place. The first was the officer who had written the report amended it to say, "officer cannot determine fault of accident." He should have known that amendment would never pass. The officer's second move was an amendment that placed the blame squarely where it should have been originally.

That was yet another case of mistrust. On two occasions I felt compelled to report incidents to the police. The first occasion involved my automobile. A fight was taking place one evening. The fight involved several blacks, who eventually fought their way to my automobile. As luck would have it, the participants began wrestling on the hood of my automobile. I called the police at that point. I identified myself. The officer wanted to know what color were the participants. I don't know whether it would have made a difference or not if I had said they were white, but no police responded to my call.

Had not my automobile been involved, I probably wouldn't have made that call. The second incident arose when a woman who appeared to be a teenager was checking out mailboxes on the street. She went from porch to porch checking the mail. I thought about the earlier call, and what had resulted. But I thought what the young lady was doing was important enough to get law enforcement involved.

So against my better judgment, and at the urging of a next door neighbor, I made the call. Again I was asked the color of the participant. I answered as truthfully as I could. I had no idea. She could have been white, Hispanic, or light-skinned black. The one thing I



knew was, I did not care what her racial background was. Whoever answered the telephone at the police station probably cared. As in the first incidence, no officer responded to the second call.

Of my NAACP involvement in the 1960s as the New London branch president, I realized that I couldn't do it all by myself. I mentioned that fact to a former executive board member. She told me, "I still remember those 6 a.m. telephone calls." Sometimes I would get calls between midnight and 6 a.m. I felt that I had to unload on someone. Most of our members were married, therefore I felt I couldn't afford to call them at that terrible 6 a.m. hour. So if I couldn't call the married ones, those single members were it. Unfortunately, there were not many in the single category and those unmarried members received the brunt of my pre-dawn telephone calls. Many times those calls were the beginning of a lot of good accomplishments. There would come a time when some people of color, for one reason or another, felt it was safe to join the NAACP. I am not guessing that to be factual. I know it is. There was one lady who told me that she joined the organization "just to get a copy of your news publication." A male told me the time had come and it was "fashionable" to be a member. In fact, it had become so "fashionable" and safe that he was thinking of running for NAACP president. That never came to pass. And without his presence as president, the NAACP continued to flourish over the years.

And there were also the unselfish members who, for reasons known only to themselves, courageously and despite fear, braved the elements of that period. There were many in that category, but Souzanne Hodge stands out in my mind. When I was first elected to the NAACP presidency, Souzanne was an employee of Electric Boat Company. I headed the Labor and Industry Committee prior to becoming president. The L and I Committee had conducted an extensive survey involving race relations and employment. Souzanne was in a position at Electric Boat where she could put together the results of the survey and run them off in booklet form. It was important that be done. I knew I did not have the time and when Souzanne stepped forward, I welcomed her assistance. I wasn't thinking at the time, and even if I had been, I probably wouldn't have tried to discourage her.

From time to time, while working on her NAACP assignment, Souzanne would give me a hint as to what she perceived to be a problem. It took her some time to complete the task. And, although she never gave me the answer I sought, she never denied it when I presented my thoughts on the subject. In that era, at the Electric Boat Company, civil rights and the NAACP were very unpopular. I suspected she would be fired on the spot if she had been caught doing NAACP work there or using company materials. One thing I was sure of was that whatever she did for the NAACP, she did on her own time. That was why she would go in on a weekend day for "a couple of hours." She didn't punch in so she wasn't being paid. But it was still a scary situation. After completing her task, Souzanne stepped aside. And for nearly forty years, she was in contact with me. In the early years she wanted certain civil rights questions answered. In the later years it was "How's your book coming?" to "Remember, save me an autographed copy."

Late in 2000, Souzanne passed away. I have often thought about the nerve it took for her to push herself to help individuals she probably would never meet. Although I singled her out, she was not alone. She was but one of those unsung individuals, working undercover, who was in the right place at the right time. Others accepted my assignments

and also braved the potential threats. They, like Souzanne, stayed with it until the task was completed, then withdrew. They became early casualties. Whether it was a matter of pride, I cannot say. But it appeared those individuals were determined to make a contribution if it was the last thing they ever did. I appreciated all of the efforts of those brave ones. It was the goodness in their hearts that caused them to rise above the dangers.

But, as in anything else, there is a downside to all of the goodness. No one knows what the future holds. Maybe if I had known during the time of the intensive civil rights movement, I would not have been so “gung-ho.” I really don’t know what I would have done. So the answer to my thoughts is still a “maybe.” What the future held was the progress curtailing, crime infested, problem of illegal narcotics.

I won’t say “We” to what transpired, although I suspect many more than I were asleep. But drugs crept into my city while I was asleep. And when I awoke, the lives of thousands were affected. If there was a major drug problem during the 1960s civil rights movement, it escaped my eyes and ears. I really don’t believe drugs were an eye popping problem back then. As far as I can remember, I first heard of a drug problem after the Viet Nam War was a number of years old. But whatever the case, a drug problem was no concern of mine during those years.

I can say with all sincerity that when I realized how the drug problem was impacting young black society I was shocked beyond belief. It was very difficult for me to believe black youngsters had allowed themselves to be caught in that trap. If those same youngsters, I believe, had been involved in the civil rights movement at the time we were, and had known the effects of racism, they never would have added another stumbling block in the path of progress. So when I finally realized the magnitude of the event and how it apparently evolved, it was as if it had happened overnight. And with that realization of what was upon us, my dreams, which we had fought so hard to implement, were turned into nightmares. We had fought hard for freedom, for equality, for dignity, and for the right to choose. In some of those areas, we had succeeded.

But cocaine, crack, heroin, marijuana, and other hallucinatory drugs literally destroyed, in a very short time, what took years to accomplish. The sons and grandsons, daughters and granddaughters of those who braved the civil rights wars were some of those caught up in those illegal drugs. We were looking for bright futures for those descendants. We wanted them to be the Suggs, the Garvins, the Fields, and the McKissicks who were ready and qualified to fill positions when the opportunities presented themselves. But weakness, not racism, was the dominant force. The right to choose carried many options. Illegal narcotics was one of those options exercised by some.

And, unfortunately, things spiraled downward. I was personally embarrassed by the sudden change of events. I spent months researching the field of illegal drugs. I was hoping to find only a minute, insignificant portion of young persons involved. What I discovered was mind-boggling. It wasn’t “only a minute, insignificant, portion of young persons involved.” And young people were not in it alone.

Now what is needed is for a movement within that drug community, such as what took place in the civil rights movement. If that happens, there will be a reversal for the better. And better late than never.

# ONE

## Migration from North Carolina

*When we moved to Stony Hill, where we lived for thirteen years,  
our school was Winthrop, where I endured what I call  
my first official confrontation with racism.*

I have been a resident of New London nearly seventy years. I know of the racism and I know of the black accomplishments. I have been subjected to the former and active in achieving the latter. This is the story of my experience and the black experience during most of the last century in southeastern Connecticut. Mainly, it is a tribute to some of those individuals and organizations who went forward, despite antagonisms, with unselfish ideas of helping the poor, the needy, the disadvantaged, and those who because of their race or color were denied first-class citizenship.

My family was a part of the early 1930s migration to New London. I can't remember when Daddy left North Carolina for Connecticut. I do know that I was walking and talking at the time. We lived in the small town of Weldon in the northern part of Halifax County, North Carolina, not far from Emporia, Virginia. I remember very little about Weldon, mere flashes. I barely remember Sis Lucy, a relative living in Weldon. She and her family lived in the other half of the two-family house in which we lived. I am distinctly able to remember George Plumber, however. Mr. Plumber had a small store on our street. I remember when I had a charge account at his store and used to charge penny candies, depending on Daddy to pay the bill.

I also faintly remember Daddy taking us four kids to the fairgrounds. The Silas Green Show set up operations every year. I remember the name Silas Green very well. I can't remember what I saw besides elephants. In the later years, I discovered that the Silas Green Show was probably the only one that frequented the area. The show was the equivalent of a combined carnival and circus attraction. The fairgrounds were also the scene of baseball games and airplane parachutist stunts.

I do remember clearly the turntable in Weldon where locomotive engines would be turned towards the direction of their next destination. I remember so clearly because I was intrigued with the sight of the engines being turned. The turning was a slow process, but I enjoyed it. Daddy took us there often to watch.

I also clearly remember Daddy being away from home quite a bit. That's why I think I don't remember when he left the area for good. He was a semi-pro baseball player, and also a baseball die-hard. He really knew how to play the game. Coley Rivers, a lifetime resident of Weldon, remembered my father. In 1986, Mr. Rivers told me, "I chased foul balls for the teams your father played for. I was a kid back then. They only had one ball,

so if I couldn't find it, the game was over." Mr. Rivers also remembered the teams boarding trains to go to different cities and towns in the state. He said they also went to Virginia and South Carolina to play games.

Other life-long residents of Weldon remembered my father and other players. Mrs. Lucille Cook, retired school teacher, Mrs. Margaret Moss, and Mrs. Pat Lou Taylor told me my father was a very good baseball player. Mrs. Myrtle Long Knox, secretary of the Halifax County National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and also a county commissioner, saw Daddy play ball. Her brother Gerald Long, who did not remember my father playing, said, however, that, "It was almost like seeing him in person," because of what his father told him. Mr. Long told me that his father had worked with my father and had talked about my father and those baseball days so much, "Your father had to be good."

When my father came to New London to live and play ball for a black team here, he left some equally good baseball players behind. Some of these southern players, as old-timers remembered them, were: Bud Coward, Dallas Scott, Levy Patterson, Blake Patterson, "Rags" Harris, Johnny Coleman, Arthur Garland, Louis Edmonds, Thomas F. Edwards and Jake Alston. Coley Rivers said Daddy's team played for two or three dollars a game.

With my father up in New London, and not planning to return South, we moved to a town named Tillery, about fifteen miles south of Weldon. Tillery was a country town, pure and simple. We got our water from a well, a spring, or a pond. The downtown consisted of a railroad station, a general store, a post office, a blacksmith shop, a gas station, a sawmill, a cotton mill, and a café. Tillery's downtown section was, without exaggeration, the size of a large supermarket.

My parents, Nannie and Linwood Bland, had four children: Rosella, a daughter who died in 1953, and sons Charles, Major, and me. Daddy moved to New London in 1929, and my mother came in 1930. She returned to Tillery after a year in New London, then returned to New London permanently in 1932. They left their children in the care of my grandmother Ada Conigland, my great-grandmother Leah Conigland, and my mother's only sister, Marie. My Uncle James also lived in Tillery. We lived in Tillery for over five years, attending school there in a one-room schoolhouse. Tillery schools taught children from the first through the eighth grades.

There were few whites in the immediate Tillery area. I would see them from time to time, but I paid little attention to them. We lived about a half-mile north of downtown, "Up the railroad tracks," as we used to say. There was a family of whites who lived between downtown and our house. I guess I never thought about whites going to school or to church. I do know that wherever we went to school or church, we had to walk.

Like many black families, we were regular churchgoers. We alternated between Tillery Chapel and Galilee Church. We also attended schools on those church grounds. Tillery Chapel was on the road to Scotland Neck. We walked that dirt road to Tillery Chapel and school.

Sometimes convicts would be working on the road early in the mornings. They would be dressed in striped clothes. At times you could see their leg chains. There was a

penal facility on the other side of the church called Calidonia Prison. Sometimes someone would tell us one of the prisoners had escaped. That's when we were often told that we had to be very careful.

Except for those at school or church, I didn't bother with many of the children. I had a close friend named James Brockett. Sometimes we would go fishing together, but that wasn't often. Many times during the summer months James had to work. I think he was much older than I, but I'm not sure. I think many people thought that I was a lonely child growing up. I believe that was misinterpreted, because most of the time I wanted to be off by myself. I would go anywhere within walking distance. It seemed as if I wasn't afraid of anything. I'm sure there was something I was afraid of, but for the life of me, I just don't remember what. That's probably because the years have dimmed my memory. There were plenty of snakes, scorpions, rabbits, and squirrels around the Tillery area. In my wanderings, which were numerous, those life forms were almost always visible.

There were two railroad trestles near Ada Ma's. One was south of her house and the other was north. I fished in the waters underneath both of them. The trestle north of the house sat over a nice-sized pond. We also used that pond as a swimming hole. A huge water tower sat near that trestle. Railroad workers refilled the boilers of the freight and passenger engines from the water tower. Like watching the turntable events in Weldon, it was intriguing to watch the trainmen use the huge tower spout. At times, my paternal cousin, Nis Thornton, watered the engines. He was the fireman on those trains. Cousin Nis lived in Weldon. As he passed our house he sometimes threw boxes of animal crackers from the train to us. We were extremely happy to get the crackers.

During the winter months we walked the railroad tracks picking up pails of coal. The coal would fall from the hopper car of the trains. We would take that coal home and use it in the stove. Everyone knew when residents were using that coal because of the thick black smoke coming from the chimneys in their homes.

Ada Ma's four-room house and small farm provided a cozy living environment for us. The trains' coal kept all of those rooms warm. The various animals provided food for the family. Ada Ma had hogs, chickens, and a cow. She even had a billy goat at one time. She worked hard taking care of us. And at times she worked on different farms. Ada Ma churned her own butter. And as winter approached, she killed one of her hogs. That was an annual event.

Ada Ma sometimes talked about working in and around Pittsburgh. She said she worked for rich white people. She also said that times were good in those days. She coaxed her brothers into coming to the Pittsburgh area and helped to secure employment in the steel mills for them.

Hearing Ada Ma talk about Pittsburgh made me wonder if they had electric lights up there, because with the exception of those downtown businesses, Tillery didn't have any electricity. We had a hand cranked RCA Victor Victrola which played 78 rpm records. For lighting, we used kerosene oil lamps. Outhouses, of course, were commonplace and I did not see indoor plumbing until I arrived in New London. The drinking water came from the well or the pump.

Tillery once consisted of huge plantations. In fact, the town of Tillery was named for slaveholders. As a child, I didn't know anything about slavery. As far as I can determine, if I can remember those years, my relatives didn't talk about slavery in the presence of children. I don't know why that was. Even when I reached adulthood, I asked my mother about it. She said that she didn't want to talk about it. The only thing she would answer was, "I've heard too much about it." And with that answer, she wouldn't even explain anything she had heard. Most of my knowledge of the Tillery area came in later years. I conducted research to uncover much of that information. As far as I know, the area has not undergone many serious changes since the days of slavery. True, there are some modern brick homes. They dot the landscape in Tillery's woody surroundings. And there are some trailer homes also. But many remnants, and landmarks from an era long past, are readily apparent.

As I look back on my childhood in the South, I can picture so many of the things I had seen my grandmothers do by hand. They were many of the same things that slaves, less than a century earlier, had done. I'm sure those things had been handed down through the ages. I remember that huge pot sitting in front or sometimes on the side of my grandmother's house. The cast-iron black pot, sitting on legs, round and cavernous, was used in many ways.

My grandmother used it to cook a huge mess of chitterlings or collard greens. Those pots were also used for boiling hair off of freshly killed hogs or feathers off freshly killed chickens. And I've seen my grandmothers make soap in the same pots. Those pots could be seen on most properties. Some of them were smaller than the one that we had.

I watched Ada Ma go to the fields in the fall of the year. She would put potatoes into the ground and cover them with straw. What she was doing was called "hilling." That "hilling" method was used to protect the potatoes from the up-coming weather during cold snaps. Her work seemed small at the time. After becoming an adult, I realized the amount of work she was actually doing. It had to be difficult for a not-so-young female. I often wonder if I could have done the things Ada Ma was doing.

Leah Ma was our great-grandmother. She was an amazing person. Through the years, I had no realization of Leah Ma's age. Only when I researched my family's history using the census records, did I make the discovery. Leah Ma died in 1946. She was 89 years old at the time of her death. That's when it struck me. According to records, she was born 1857, eight years before slavery's end. The amazing part was what she was doing in her 70s. The records were accurate. They showed she was 23 years old in 1880 and 53 years old in 1910. We left Tillery in 1935. At that time, Leah Ma was 78. Her activities in no way indicated her age. She would split logs, and cut them up into smaller pieces with an ax. She would then bring the pieces into the house tucked in her apron. She carried water from the well or pump, whichever was in use at the time. She loved fishing. I used to go with her sometimes.

As soon as her chores were done around the house, she would stick her corn cob pipe in her mouth. That was the signal for me to grab my fishing pole. Down the railroad tracks we would go. Leah Ma taught me how to make fishhooks by using safety pins or wire. We didn't buy fishhooks in those days. I am not even sure fish hooks were marketed then. But even if they were, we could not have afforded to buy them. The ponds



were where the redfins, crawfish, and catfish lived. Bull frogs, terrapins, turtles, and snakes also frequented the ponds. The snakes at times could be seen moving with lightning rapidity through the water. And not the least of it were the leeches and scorpions that lived in that environment. The local churches also used the ponds for baptisms. I truly miss Leah Ma for all that she taught and revealed to me.

On June 3, 1935, after the Tillery schools had closed for their summer vacation, I remember when our Aunt Marie took us to the Tillery train station. She purchased tickets for the five of us. We were now leaving the land of cotton, tobacco, and bird peas. We were also leaving the wild strawberries, blackberry bushes, huckleberry bushes, and wild blueberries. I am sure that I was so excited by events that a sense of loss never entered my mind. Now, after many years have rolled by, there is the vivid recollection of the things that I left behind.

Even though I was quite young, ever since I could remember, I had worked in some capacity. I picked cotton, berries, and bird peas. I had my own private fig tree. I don't believe anyone else, except me, knew that particular tree existed. There were also the orchards of peaches, pears, and apples. There also was an occasional plum tree. Plum trees were less abundant than the crabapple trees. There were pecan and hickory nut trees. There were also plenty of cheney ball, pine, and locust trees. And there were the acres and acres of peanuts, whose plants could be seen lining the landscape. I also had a hand in pulling the peanuts from the ground, then shaking the dirt from around them.

We were leaving all of that. And, yes, we were also leaving the land of "ash cakes." "Ash cakes" are made of corn meal and cooked on the fiery ashes in a fireplace or a pot-bellied stove. We were leaving all of those things, going north to a foreign—and as we had heard so often—a cold land. We were going to New London, Connecticut, where our mother and father lived.

## **Northward**

After boarding the train for our trip northward, because of our skin color, the rules of the day forced us to ride in the Jim Crow passenger car reserved for black people. On our way north, as the train picked up passengers between Tillery and Washington, D.C., the car became standing room only. When we reached Washington, we changed trains. From Washington to New London we could sit in any car we wanted. The trip seemed like it took forever, but the following afternoon, June 4, we arrived in New London. Before we left Tillery, I remember Cousin Nis being in the train station. His purpose was twofold. He was there to see us off and he also had a message to send to Daddy. "Tell Red Top I said hello," he told us. Cousin Nis was referring to my father. "Red Top" was the name people called my father in North Carolina. The name came about because he had red hair. Daddy also had freckles.

Daddy never told me, but his father reportedly was white. I tried to research whether that was a fact or not, but I have never been able to prove or disprove it. If Daddy had known what the truth was, I don't know of anyone he divulged it to. If he did know the truth, and didn't divulge it, Daddy carried the secret to his grave in 1972.

Although he never mentioned his father to me, Daddy talked about many other things. But the basics of baseball was his favorite subject. He also told me about his travels. Rosella Bland—my grandmother and mother of Geneva, Charles Jr., and my father—took this group to Newport News, Virginia. As a youngster in Newport News, Daddy attended school there and played baseball. When he was old enough to work, Daddy went to work at the Newport News Shipyard. While working at the shipyard, he continued to play baseball. Also playing ball in Newport News was L'Overature "Luke" Harris. Harris played against Daddy's team from time to time. Daddy's sister, Geneva, then married John Harris, Sr., who was in the Navy. John Harris was the brother of Luke Harris. Being in the Navy, John was transferred to New London. Luke Harris also left Newport News for New London in the 1920s. He came to New London and began working at the Mohican Hotel and playing baseball for the Prentiss Tigers. And Daddy, now old enough to be on his own, left the shipyard, and returned to Weldon. He secured employment at the Hotel Weldon. His work hours at the hotel enabled him to join an area team and resume his baseball playing. For the Weldon area team, he played every position with the exception of pitcher. I think if he had to pitch for the lack of a hurler, as much as he loved the game, Daddy would have pitched. That was the father that I came to know. It seemed that he also loved football, college and professional, but baseball he put on a pedestal. He also frequented high school sports activities. But Daddy's first love took a back seat to no other.

I loved to listen to my mother talk about my father and baseball. They married when he returned to Weldon from Newport News. He played baseball in Weldon before marriage, and he played baseball in Weldon after marriage. My mother told me Daddy was a good ball player. In fact, she said, he was one of the better ones in the Weldon area.

In the meantime, Daddy's mother remarried. She married Howard Gibbs, who was also a Navy man. Like Harris, Sr., Gibbs was also transferred to New London. Mama Rosa, as we called her, left Newport News and followed her husband to New London. The Prentiss Tigers, for which Luke Harris had been playing baseball, folded. The talk of forming another team quickly surfaced. With another baseball team proposed for New London, word reached my father. There was a job at the Mohican Hotel for my father. But he had to be convinced to come to New London. I think it was not really the job, but playing baseball that caused my father to leave North Carolina. Daddy walked right into the Mohican Hotel to work, and right on to the Colored Giants (formerly the Yergans) baseball team. His only return to any parts of the South, after he left North Carolina, was for a wedding.

After we arrived in New London from North Carolina, our residence became 73 Hempstead Street. My best friend in those days was Emil E. Tortora who lived next door to us. My brothers and sister and I attended Saltonstall School for the two years we lived on Hempstead. When we moved to Stony Hill, where we lived for thirteen years, our school was Winthrop, where I endured what I call my first official confrontation with racism.

There had been prior incidents of race and there would be incidents after. But these incidents involved mainly confrontations between children, with those exchanges usually ending in a draw. However, such was not the case with the Winthrop School incident, an episode so bizarre and so mind-boggling, that, unless I lose my mind, I will never forget. As young as I was, I chalked it up to experience. But it has stuck with me throughout my

life. I guess it's one of those things a person never forgets because it is burned into one's memory. I was to find out the hard way about subtle racism. I didn't know what I had done, except my blackness, to deserve special treatment. But I was to be the only one singled out. The incident happened in 1937 or 1938. It wasn't the year in which it happened; it was what occurred. I only mentioned the year because ten cents was a great amount of money in those days, especially to a child in elementary school.

I happened to be the only black child in the class on that particular day. Another black youngster, Robert Miller, was assigned to that classroom, but he was absent. Of the three individuals involved, I remember neither the teacher nor the white female's name. I only remember the event, and that I was in the middle of it because I was that third individual. The white female had a dime when she came to school that day; however, the dime turned up missing. The incident began as a routine thing. The teacher announced to the class that the girl had a dime when she arrived at school. She also announced that the dime was missing. I remember all of the children, including myself, looking underneath our desks. We were also looking in the aisles on both sides of the desks. My desk was two or three seats behind the girl, and I looked to see if her dime was nearby. Like the other children in the class, I felt sorry for the girl because she was crying. When the school day was nearing its end, the teacher asked me to stay after school. It was no big thing when she asked me to stay. I knew I had not been unruly, or caused any problems in class that day. There were times that I was not so nice. But that day, I knew I had caused no trouble. I figured that she wanted me to help her do something after class. As the other students emptied the room, I noticed the girl, who had lost the dime, was still sitting there.

At that point, I began to get an odd feeling. The teacher told the girl to look in her desk again. The girl raised the lid on the desk and fumbled through it again. That uneasy feeling stayed with me because the girl apparently did not find the money. Then the teacher spoke to me. She asked me to stand. It was then that I found that I had a genuine reason to feel uneasy. After the teacher asked me to stand, she told me to empty my pockets. I felt a little relieved, but I don't believe I felt a total relief. Yet I knew there was no way I could have had any money in any of my pockets, especially an item as small as a dime. My problem was that if I didn't have the girl's money, wondering what would I have to endure next. I did what the teacher told me to do. I pulled all of my pockets out and showed the holes to her. I was glad, because all of my pockets had holes in them. I told her that I did not have a cent. The one thing that made me glad was that even if I had had a penny, or even a quarter or a nickel, I didn't have a dime. But I still stood there beside my desk, embarrassed and humiliated. In the meantime, the girl began holding her books over the aisle and shaking them. As she shook one of the books, "lo and behold," a dime fell to the floor. I watched as the girl picked the money up from the floor. There were no apologies to me from anyone. I now became the forgotten one. There was only happiness between the teacher and the student. The only other thing that happened after the dime was retrieved from the floor was that I was told that I could go home. Over the years, that teacher, and that female student, may have forgotten about that incident. But I haven't. Sure I was young. It was true I had been in New London for only a couple of years, but I needed no one to tell me I was the victim of racism. I will never forget it.

It wasn't just this incident that caused me to pay closer attention to race. I was well aware of some things before the incident happened. A black child had to contend with name-calling by adult whites and their children. In school, white children left scars that could usually be

erased. The adults left scars, however, not easily erased. To make matters worse, there were evidences of built-in racism—the American and world history books.

Black children dreaded reading American history. That was because, invariably, American history books carried degrading photographs. The photographs depicted blacks in southern states carrying baskets of cotton on their heads. If not this, then you could almost guarantee images of blacks in a cotton field. And the texts of those American history books were not any better. Many times they would refer to adult blacks and their children as “pickaninnies” living in shacks and the like. It was as if blacks were not doing anything else, or capable of doing anything else. World history, in its depiction of the African continent, and its peoples, ran along the same lines. In the world history books, artists drew pictures of Africans with “pancake lips.” Other Africans were shown with a bone running through their noses. Many times a student would be called upon to read aloud the description next to the picture of Africans. Such readings resulted in angry displays by students in many history classes. Usually, there would be snickers directed at classroom blacks, which would result in cross words directed at the readers. The readings rarely explained the true greatness of African culture and history.

The lack of true education about African history and discrimination hurt African American students. One black female told me, “At one time, history was my best subject. I used to love history until we reached the part about Africa. Then they would begin to talk about the flat noses, the pancake lips, and the kinky hair. That’s when history became my worst subject.” She went on, “In reading about the African description, some of those white children would turn around and look at me with a giggle.” She also said, “Then I would become angry and ask them what were they looking at. It was awfully dispiriting when the African subject came up. God, they weren’t nice at all. You would think the books would tell something blacks had accomplished that was helpful to mankind. But no, they wanted to keep us ignorant and keep the white students ignorant, too.” The same lady also told me she had protested discrimination pertaining to local photograph studios. “Blacks had pictures taken regularly, too,” she said, “but some studios ignored them. They wouldn’t put pictures of their black customers in their window displays. We spent a lot of money in those places, but they couldn’t put our pictures on display.” For New London blacks, race played a part in just about all of life’s activities.

I personally remember my father telling me about a major insurance company that had racial preferences. It wasn’t because the company didn’t hire blacks. I strongly suspect they didn’t. But that’s not what Daddy was talking about. He said the company wouldn’t issue an insurance policy to blacks. I was sure the company wasn’t Metropolitan Life because that company was the one in which we were enrolled. Daddy was talking about another major company whose agent said they didn’t enroll blacks. Daddy told me he had asked the agent several times to write him a policy. The answer was always “no.”

To my father’s surprise, one day the agent said he could grant him a policy in his company. “I thought it was a joke, but I played along,” my father said. Daddy told me the agent filled out the application, and how he had “played along” by signing it. It took some time for the agent to return to the Mohican Hotel where Daddy worked. Daddy said he wondered what had happened to the agent. Eventually, the agent did return.

He had brought the policy to Daddy. Daddy said he was curious to know how the agent enrolled him after denying him a policy for so long with the company. The agent answered my father with these words, "From now on, you're an Indian."

Daddy did not tell me of the incident until the 1950s, but I had found out early and often that race and color made a major difference. I had come to New London as a stranger. As far as I was concerned, or knew, blacks were the dominant group. I had seen very few whites in Tillery.

Recently, I have heard so many blacks saying they didn't know they were black until this or that happened. Those were black New Londoners saying these things. They had been born or raised in the midst of whites. I didn't know I was black either. But I had a different reason. Where I was raised, the early years of my life were in the midst of blacks. I wasn't exposed to whites. Being young, and also basically a loner, I had little contact with the white community in North Carolina.

The churches I went to were all black. The schools I went to were all black. Either my people, meaning my immediate relatives, as far as I can remember, did not talk about whites, or I didn't listen to the talk about whites. I came to New London with these disadvantages. I was soon to be rudely awakened. I didn't know what an Italian, Jew, Philipino, Puerto Rican, or Slav was. We did not have these names in the books in North Carolina. In New London, I learned about different ethnic groups. Unfortunately, I began to hear derogatory ones such as "Wop," "Sheenie," and "Kike." There were also words like "Dago," "Coon," "Nigger," and "Monkey Chaser." The racial and ethnic epithets were so numerous that I know I have forgotten many of them. Coming from North Carolina, I had little knowledge of the wide variety of derogatory terms I'd encounter. With the exception of "Nigger" and "Coon," I had no idea to which group those other names referred. But even so, when I initially heard those slangy names, I did not like them.

I sensed as a child that those names were evil, but I did not know why. I did not use such terms in my conversations with others, although others did. I soon found out to which group they were referring. I also eventually learned about issues deemed by society as women's issues. The "Manifest Danger of falling into the ways of Vice," a catchall law aimed at females, was one of those issues. I also learned that law officers routinely engaged in the practice of "running" prostitutes out of town. Another law on the books was "lascivious carriage." It appears to me that that law was designed to try to prevent racially mixed coupling from occurring. Those specific laws have since been expunged.

I have said that I found out early and often about race and color. I also found that people, generally speaking, were insensitive to what came out of their mouths. Other people found it was easy to tell a racial joke and get a laugh. I didn't like jokes about race, or being referred to as a "Nigger."

During the summer months, the Griswold Hotel was a resort for white families. Morton Plant had built the hotel in 1906. Florida blacks had come up to Groton to work in the hotel in the summer and then went back to Florida to work in other Plant hotels during the winter months. Frank Williams, his wife Laura Williams, and Parmalee Tillman came with the Plant family into this area. They traveled seasonally with the

white family. Some black people, however, tired of the grueling trips up and down the coast and decided to live in the city permanently.

This pattern continued into the 1930s and 1940s. Wealthy whites recruited blacks from the Caribbean and other areas to perform domestic work. Some Caribbean people remained in the city. There were Caribbean people among the black World War I and World War II veterans.

Lemuel and Carimar Payne, Major and Sally Dennis, and Fred and Isabelle Rogers came to the area as employees of Connecticut College. They lived on the grounds of Connecticut College and became citizens. A group of Georgia blacks also moved into the area to work for Sidney Wood. Wood owned Skipper's Dock.

Jobs for blacks in the service area boomed in the 1930s. Many blacks came to the region because friends and relatives told them about the availability of employment. The Mohican Hotel, Crocker House, Griswold Hotel, Pease House, Seaport Manor, Red Rooster, Skipper's Dock, Norwich Inn, Rotisserie, Pequot Casino, Oswegatchie House, Lighthouse Inn, Ninigret House, and Cinderella Inn offered places of employment. In Pawcatuck, Connecticut, The Orchard House was co-owned by two black women, Mrs. Minnie Epps Carter and her sister Mrs. Gertrude Epps Owens. The sisters opened the establishment for the express purpose of providing decent lodging for traveling black professionals. During the summer months, they also provided employment for local residents. William H. Baum, a black New London resident, operated the Blue Parrot Inn.

During the Great Depression, both blacks and whites suffered economically, but black suffering frequently revolved around race issues. Mercifully, many of those "in service" jobs managed to ride out the Great Depression. In addition, New Deal programs such as Work Project Administration (WPA) and Civilian Construction Corps (CCC) saved many families.

Many white families lost everything as a result of the Great Depression. My father sneaked sandwiches out of the Mohican Hotel's back door to a young white man whose family lost everything. Although later this man became city manager of one of the larger cities in the area, at that time things were horrible. In addition, any inkling of wealth by a black person could be detrimental. My father, for example, lost his job because his boss thought he bought a new car during the Great Depression. The boss rehired my father after he learned that my father had not purchased an automobile.

The most important institution in the black community was, and still is, the black church. It was the backbone of the black community. It always has been, and, with rare exceptions, probably always will be. At present, I cannot foresee anything replacing those churches as a foundation.

In 1935, such churches included a Holiness Church of a minor denomination, the Walls Temple African Methodist-Episcopal Zion Church, and the Shiloh Baptist Church. I was unable to trace the name of the pastor at the Holiness Church. The pastor of the AME Zion Church was The Reverend Albert Garvin, Sr. The pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church was The Reverend David Moss. Other churches grew with the increase of the black population during the war years. They emerged as storefronts. The older, more



established churches of Shiloh Baptist and the AME Zion were the bedrock of the community.

Part of my understanding about the importance of churches to children came from attending church in North Carolina. I can also fondly remember the churches in North Carolina. There were three of them, Tillery Chapel, Shady Grove, and Galilee. Many children, those who didn't have to work on farms, or do other chores, were provided activities by those churches during the summer months.

There were many children in Tillery, and I can imagine elsewhere, who were unable to take advantage of the opportunities provided by churches. This was because of their work obligations. The older the child, the more he was expected to produce. Not only is this true concerning church-related activities; because of work necessary on farms, some youngsters were not even able to attend school on a regular basis. It was like that in North Carolina when I was a child. Concerning some children, and I know it for a fact, it was a rare occasion to see them in school. But young people not so unfortunate as those required to work found the church waiting with open arms.

The churches were trying to help them in any way they could. There were always churches conducting activities for youth. I feel certain the Holiness Church and the Methodist Church have always done their share. I know Shiloh Baptist Church has. We walked right out of our church in North Carolina, right into Shiloh Baptist Church in New London. We were in attendance at Shiloh every Sunday. And we attended summer school at the church, also. The summer events were made up of games and other recreational activities, plus refresher school subjects. The school subjects were various, but, as a rule, the summer would almost invariably end with a spelling bee.

The churches always had Easter Pageants and Christmas Programs. When we arrived in New London in 1935, we missed Easter by a couple of months. But we participated in the huge Christmas Program at Shiloh Baptist Church. To have their children involved, and more than peripherally, in such a program would have made any parent proud.

In all likelihood, The Reverend David W. Moss, pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church, introduced Black History Week to this area. Blacks were very scarce in the early and mid 1920s. But in the late 1920s and early 1930s, their numbers began to increase noticeably. Reverend Moss was pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church in the 1930s. He worked closely with Dillard University in New Orleans, Louisiana. Dillard had a history of arranging programs for Black History Week. Black History Week was an annual February event at Shiloh during Reverend Moss's tenure there. I am not sure whether the event was carried on at Shiloh beyond 1936, but I feel certain it was a February main event at Walls Temple in later years.

In 1936, the last year Black History Week was scheduled at Shiloh, The Reverend Gilbert Coffey was guest speaker. Reverend Coffey was from Bridgeport. I discovered that he was pastor of Walls Temple AME Zion Church here in New London from 1941 through 1944. That is why I feel Black History Week was not forsaken at Walls Temple while Reverend Coffey was there. Those who knew him reported that Reverend Coffey was an outstanding and dedicated scholar. Early New London residents said that he was a man who was knowledgeable about black achievement. Reginald Eccleston, Jr., said, "He

was always studying about our race.” The 1936 Shiloh Baptist Black History Week event was a massive one. Reverend Coffey, and others from Bridgeport, came to New London and spent a week. *The Day*, New London’s newspaper, reported that a number of plays were presented. Among them were the depictions of the black man’s contributions in African art, and the life of Harriet Tubman and Crispus Attucks. There was another segment called “The Negro World in Chaos.” It is little wonder that the event was spread out over the entire week.

The Baptist Young Peoples’ Union sponsored the event. Mrs. Mattie Jackson and Roy Smith were chairpersons. I knew Mrs. Jackson, wife of William Jackson. Jackson was a bellhop at the Mohican Hotel. He was also the shortstop for the Colored Giants baseball team. I also knew Mr. Smith. I am quite sure they tried to make that 1936 program the best ever. They were that dedicated. When Mrs. Jacqueline Dell, NAACP chair of the Education Committee, held a Black History program in 1961, many blacks thought it was the first. Little did we know that Shiloh Baptist had been doing the same thing when many of us were just babies.

Mrs. Dell’s first effort was in obtaining Neville T. D. Karakaratne to speak at that 1961 program. He was the Ceylon Representative to the United Nations. In 1962 Mrs. Dell had as our guest speaker Joel Rogers, a noted historian on black history, who had written a number of books about it. The following year, NAACP National Office activist Thomas Allen was guest speaker. Then came Julia Baxter, another National Office person to speak at our program. Mrs. Dell told me, when she proposed the initial program, that to her chagrin, a number of blacks reacted negatively. However, because of an annual diet of the programs in the subsequent years, Black History Week became more and more acceptable among blacks.

Most of those programs were conducted in churches. After researching and talking with local people, I discovered the origins of these enduring black churches in the city. In 1894, Shiloh Baptist Church became the first black church founded in New London. It was located first on Green Street, then the center of black culture in New London. Many of Shiloh’s church records became mildewed and subsequently were destroyed. Shiloh was followed in 1905 by the founding of Walls Temple AME Zion. This church moved frequently, being located at different times on Bank, Main, Green, Steward, and Belden Streets.

Many years later, after World War II, as the black population increased, other churches were formed. One of those later black churches was Pentecostal Temple on Jefferson Avenue, with Pastor Reverend J.R. Madry. That church moved from Jefferson Avenue to Manwaring Hill. A new church was built on Manwaring and was renamed Madry Temple Church of God in Christ. There was the Mount Mariah Fire Baptized Holiness Church on Moore Avenue. Its pastor was Reverend David Cornish. The city also added the Pentecostal Rescue Mission—The Church Of God in Christ on Blackhall Street. Its pastor was Reverend L. C. Fisher. Later, the Calvary Church Of God in Christ emerged on Blinman Street. Its pastor was Reverend Richard Rodgers. The Morning Star Apostolic Church, Inc., developed on Connecticut Avenue; its pastor was Reverend Arabelle Hodges, with Elder Edwin Bostick assisting.

There were also other churches in the city. In the 1980s, Trinity Missionary Baptist Church emerged at 60 Blackhall Street. Reverend Wade Hyslop was its pastor. Reverend

Hyslop took care of the poor by establishing soup kitchens. There was Miracle Temple Church, 727 Bank Street. Reverend Lloyd Delong was pastor. His son Larry succeeded him. When the Apostolic Cathedral of Hope opened on Broad Street its pastor was Elder John Nelson. This church moved to Green Street in 1998 and Evangelist Alice Thorton became pastor.

In Norwich, there was also Beulah Land Church Of God in Christ; The Reverend Marcus Luther was its pastor. In Groton was St. John's Christian Church with The Reverend Joseph Coleman, Jr. In Ledyard, there is the New Life Church with the Reverends Johnny and Sharon Burns as pastors.

One has to realize what roadblocks black leaders—religious and secular—had to face, especially the main obstacle—the racist attitude of the local hierarchy. Even today, in what we think is an enlightened atmosphere, some racist attitudes still persist. But some progress was made back then. And the improvements did not occur without someone sticking his or her neck out. There were many unpublicized events that led to changes, and there were publicized ones that also had positive outcomes. Although changes came slowly, there were changes.

### **“Like Jackie and Joe”**

Jackie Robinson's integration of major league baseball in 1947 dramatically changed the nation. It was the “American Past-time” that had brought my father to New London. Finding a job at the Mohican Hotel allowed him to pursue the game he loved. My father and other old-timers were part of the wave that opened people's eyes to the abilities of black athletes. In turn, some of the negative ideas about black abilities probably diminished. Sports offered an opportunity for a level playing field for the country's young people to compete. New London's athletic teams and athletes followed a pattern set by Negro League teams, and some semi-pro teams around the country.

In the New London area, black baseball teams in the 1920s and 30s changed their names and sponsors frequently. They were first named the Prentiss Tigers. This team was sponsored by Sam Prentiss, an undertaker. Then came the Yergans, of the Municipal League. In the late twenties, “Bill” Thompson and James H. Brown were instrumental in forming the New London Colored Giants of the Morgan Park League. Finally, before the existence of segregated teams was over, the team's name was changed to the Whales. Linwood W. Bland, Sr., who was known as “Red” Bland in Connecticut, as opposed to “Red Top” in North Carolina, played for the Colored Giants. He was playing for the Giants when we arrived in New London in 1935. It was in that year that the team's name was changed to the Whales.

My father's teammates were Luke Harris, Clarence Brown, Albert “Bootsie” Brown, John Seay, Johnny Brown, Dave Sparrow, George Sparrow, Morris Brown, Boothe Miller, William Lyons, William Jackson, Freddie DeBarrows, Harry “Slim Boy” Simpson, Johnny Myers, Jimmy Jackson, B. Hadley, Sunny Wilson, and Johnny Ware. Ware, a full-blooded Oklahoma Indian, functioned as player/manager.

The black teams played the best white teams in the New London area during the 1920s and '30s. The teams would sometimes go by ferry and play teams on Fishers

Island. These teams were part of the Morgan Park League. Morgan Park and Davis Field were where the teams played most of their games. They also played games at Mercer Field on Town Hill. They played such teams as Electric Boat (EB) and Standard Oil Company of New York (SOCONY). EB and SOCONY had the best teams in the area. I make special mention of these two companies for historical reasons: These teams scouted white players only. If the white players met the company's standards for being skilled athletes, they would be put on the payrolls. Morton Jeffers, Jr., was approached to play for EB, but he was offered no employment. Jeffers' father stepped in and said, "If my son can't work for you, he can't play ball for you."

In 1933, the Colored Giants, the most successful of that era's black teams, won eleven games in a row. My father, who played numerous positions, and pitcher George Sparrow, were the only black players selected to play on New London's first all-star team

Discriminatory practices played a huge part in local sports. Black players, no matter how skilled and agile, were not afforded the courtesies of full equality. A few teams put blacks on their rosters. Tarny's Cubs, the Shamrocks, Waterford Fire Department, and New London's Nameaug and Oxford fire engine teams were such exceptions.

Although the league teams were basically segregated, Johnny Browne was an exceptional local black athlete. He played for each of these five teams. Robert Gair, another major employer in the same category as EB and SOCONY, wanted Browne, but they wouldn't provide him a job. He also played for all of the black teams in the 1920s and '30s. At the end of the 1928 baseball season, he was awarded a cup by the league for being base stealing champion while playing for the Waterfords. The cup is still in the possession of Johnny's daughter Katrina. Johnny was an all-round athlete starring at Chapman Technical High School in track and field, football, and baseball. Johnny's brother Morris Browne and Morton Jeffers were other local blacks who were well known for their pitching.

Black teams played numerous opponents such as the above named Nameaug, Oxfords, Quaker Hill, the Police, and Shamrocks. They also played the East Ends, Jordans, Polish Athletic Club, Robert Gair, and teams from Norwich.

Most of those teams, because of so many young men being drafted into the services, faded away when World War II got underway. However, before the war took its toll on the local baseball teams, the summer months were fun. Each time our team played, we would be found walking to the ballpark. On rare occasions, we would walk up Town Hill to Mercer Field. Or, when the team played in Waterford, we would walk past Mercer Field to Davis Field. But that was only when Daddy's team was scheduled to play at those fields.

It was to Morgan Park, however, that we walked to most of the time. It was like going to a cookout on game day. Most of the time there was standing room only, for the games were very well attended. Each time Daddy's team played, often twice a week, the Mohican Hotel was short of waiters and bellhops. Many of those black ball players were employed at that enterprise. On game days, whenever the Giants or the Whales played, I suspect that service at the Mohican Hotel proceeded at a snail's pace.

While researching the history of New London baseball, I discovered records showing that my father's younger brother, Charles Irving Bland, Jr., was pitching for the Prentiss Tigers in 1927. This fact surprised me until I discovered that my grandmother was in New London as early as 1924, with my father arriving four years later.

As I think back on early black baseball teams, I am reminded of something Joseph Julliarine, a former police officer with the New London Police Department, said, "When we didn't want to face a certain pitcher [George Sparrow], we would arrest him." Julliarine played for the police department during the Colored Giants and Whales era. Speaking of playing against the black teams, he told me with a grin, "When we played those teams, we'd say it was the Cops and the Robbers."

As the country became more deeply embroiled in World War II, the Whales baseball team and some white teams disbanded. There were still enough teams for a smaller league. My father, Linwood Sr., closed out his semi-pro baseball career playing for the New London Police Department. George Sparrow, the blazing lefty pitcher, moved out of the area. He was scouted and became a star pitcher with the Negro League's Homestead Grays of Pittsburgh. When Sparrow left New London, he made his home in New York. My father and I last saw him at a World Series game in New York in the 1940s. Sparrow was just a spectator. Henry Fulford, Jr., also left New London and became a school principal in Virginia. The final all black baseball team for which I could find a record was an Elks team of the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Baseball wasn't the only semi-pro sport New London blacks played in those years. Blacks had a solid basketball team also. The Yergans (same name as the baseball team) formed in the late 1920s. As I began to write about them, I began to wonder why two early black sports teams had carried that name. I learned that Max Yergan was a prominent black man in the U.S. and a YMCA organizer, which explained why a team sponsored by the Y carried his name. If he ever set foot in New London, I was not able to discover. It was clear to me, however, that wherever in the world Max Yergan had traveled, he had made an impact on someone in or around New London.

Max Yergan was a well-known contemporary of the great Paul Robeson and W.E.B. DuBois. He was involved in the YMCA movement for black people and the Council on African Affairs. Yergan, Robeson, and Alphaeus Hunt, son of the greatest African American secretary of the American YMCA, formed the Council on African Affairs. Yergan provided lodging for Essie Robeson during a stay in South Africa. Felix Lyles and Henry Fulford, New London residents, and founders of both the baseball and basketball teams knew Max Yergan. I learned that Lyles, Fulford, Irving "Casey" Gilliam, and his brother, Clifford "Dibby" Gilliam, were four of the original Yergans.

A New Yorker and member of the team, Charley Miller, remembered a great deal about the team of the early 1930s. I interviewed him on a number of occasions about early black athletes. He told me that Henry Fulford, Sr., also played on the team. Fulford had played with the Coast Guard football team, though he wasn't in the Coast Guard. I knew Fulford, Sr., years after his gridiron and basketball episodes were over. When I knew Mr. Fulford, I had no idea his past included football and basketball. I knew Henry, Jr., his son. The younger Fulford was active in football and baseball. Of Fulford, Sr., Charley Miller used the description "rugged." Football was his forte, Miller told me. "He

did play for the Yergans, but football was his major game. And boy was he good,” Miller concluded.

Miller also had high praise for a basketball player named Drafton Roberts. “Roberts was only in New London a few years during the 1930s, but he was the best basketball player that I had ever seen. Roberts could do anything with a basketball,” Miller said, “and they made him captain of the Yergans. It was a thrill to play on the same team with Roberts. And, besides that, I learned a lot from him.” Miller continued the Roberts story, “He came from someplace in the South. He was ‘All-Southern’ at one of the black colleges.” While shaking his head, Miller continued with, “You know, if professional basketball teams had been signing blacks back then, Roberts would have been a shoo-in.” Miller thought for awhile, then told me, “The professionals really blew a good chance to get a guy like him.”

Charley Miller also had high praises for his brother, Boothe. “As a freshman,” Miller said of his brother, “he played baseball, football and basketball. He could do anything. And while he was at Chapman Technical High School, he was all everything. But it wasn’t just those sports Boothe loved,” Miller beamed, “he was a hell of a Ping Pong player. My brother was the Ping Pong champion of New London.”

Miller mentioned others such as Carl Taylor, Joseph Epps, Jr., Joseph Daniels, and Joseph and Freddie DeBarrows from Norwich. Miller’s brothers, Jackie and Boothe, had been mainstays of the Yergan basketball team from the early 1930s. For over two decades, the Yergans flourished. Added to the team in the mid, and late ’30s were William “Billy” Goode, his brother Deanie, Morton Jeffers, Jr., Miller’s brothers, Kenneth, Walter and Robert, Reginald Eccleston, Jr., and, finally, Tommy Ezell Strong. Tommy was in the Navy when he came to New London in the 1940s. He said that he played with the Yergans off and on “when they were just about defunct.”

I located one of their games in the local paper. The Yergans scheduled a game in Middletown, Connecticut, on February 9, 1938; however, there was a heavy snowstorm during the day of the 9th. Yet despite the heavy snow, the Yergans decided to drive to Middletown anyway. Then having gone but a few miles from New London, they suffered a flat tire and they had to buy a new one. But that was only the beginning. They resumed their trip. But as the team—Joe Daniels, Mort Jeffers, Jr., Casey Gilliam, and the brothers Charley, Jackie and Boothe Miller—passed somewhere beyond the area of Salem Four Corners, an avalanche of loose snow fell from a mountain above their vehicle. Charley was driving, and the heavy, tumbling snow shoved their automobile off the ice-filled road over an embankment. As Charley described the accident to me, “The car landed on its side. Blood was everywhere. My brother Boothe banged his head and the blood was running pretty freely.” Miller continued, “A guy came by in a car and picked us up. He took all of us to the hospital in Middletown.” After being assured that Boothe would be taken care of, knowing they still had enough players for the game, they went to the arena. Having purchased a new tire, and paid the hospital for treating Boothe, they were almost broke. They had only one dollar among them. But they were alive. When Boothe was released from the hospital, he thumbed a ride to the game. According to Charley, “Boothe arrived sometime around halftime. But he was in no condition to play basketball, or anything else.” Charley said that Boothe insisted he was fine. He convinced them that he was OK, so they let him play. The *Day’s* report of the score indicated a final of 49 to 18;



not one of the team's members was in any playing condition. They had been drubbed. It was getting late; they had no car and almost no money. Besides that, they were still in Middletown, miles from home.

At that time, Italy had invaded Ethiopia. The players entered an Italian restaurant with their lone dollar bill. *The Day* told the rest of the incident in its February 10, 1938, edition. "A group of Italians were having a heated discussion of the Italian-Ethiopian War. The Yergans knew the restaurant was no place for them. They ordered coffee and donuts to go." When I spoke with Charley Miller, he said the incident "was not exactly as the paper reported it." He smiled when he said, "There were a few tense moments in that restaurant." In any event, they spent the night at the Middletown Police Station. They were not put under arrest. They just didn't have enough money. "The Middletown Police were nice to us," Charley told me. "Especially when we told them we knew Captain William T. Babcock, head of the New London Police Department. They let us sleep in the police station all night. But, boy, were those wooden benches hard."

Thinking back to an episode in an era long past, Miller said, "The Middletown Police contacted Chief Babcock. The New London Chief confirmed that we were who we had told them we were." At the urging of Captain Babcock, the Middletown Police put the team on a bus. Babcock said that he would pay their transportation upon their arrival in New London. While in Middletown, and on their way home by bus, they discussed whether they should cancel the remainder of their games. But those were only discussions. The following week they were on their way to play in White Plains, New York.

After reviewing the report in *The Day* on the Middletown incident, Miller said, "It was half-right, half-wrong. *The Day* used to do that to us. They would write something the way they wanted to write it." He said, "When we went to see how badly damaged the car was, I was amazed. When we rolled it over, there was hardly any damage done. And I had no problem starting it either. I drove it up the embankment and came on home." They repaid Chief Babcock when they got paid from their jobs.

When not on the road, the Yergans' home court was the YMCA. They also played some games in the basement of the Methodist Church on Broad Street. In addition to Middletown and White Plains, the Yergans also traveled to Boston, Providence, Hartford, New Haven, and to other cities and towns in nearby states. The Yergan Athletic Club continued to function in a small capacity during the war years. The Yergans, however, were only a skeleton of what had been. Local teams had now become unique. All of their games were played at night. The Yergans were fortunate because of this night game policy since a number of sailors, stationed at the Submarine Base, or stationed aboard ships in the New London area, would be recruited. And local teenagers from Bulkeley High School, and Chapman Technical High School were also allowed to play for the team. Nevertheless, in the late 1940s, the Yergans exited the scene and became history.

Prior to World War II, New London also had its share of black "prize fighters," as my father used to say. Seldom were these athletes called boxers. Now the former term has long disappeared. Among some of those top-notch New London "prize fighters" were Eddie "Kid" Jackson, Anthony "Tony" Andreas, Angelo "Monk" Gonzales, Deanie Goode, Joseph "Pullie" Gomez, and Florio Lamont "Flip" Andreas. I was told that James "Jimmy" Shankle was an excellent heavyweight boxer. Shankle was to become, in his

later years, a reporter for the Baltimore Afro-American newspaper. When I was growing up, I had never heard that Shankle was involved in the boxing sport. Maybe that was because he fought out of the state capital in Hartford. But I did know him when he was a reporter. "Casey" Gilliam and his brothers Lloyd and Harold boxed as well.

Of special interest to me were the Andreas brothers. I had seen Tony and Flip, as they were known in boxing circles, fight on a number of occasions. Both brothers stood out in the field of Connecticut amateur boxing and occasionally, as bookings dictated, they sometimes appeared on the same fight card. "Flip" began fighting as a lightweight but then moved into the welterweight class. He was successful, and won the Connecticut State Welterweight title in 1939. He won the championship belt by knocking out Billy Conklin in the 3rd round. "Tony" won a state championship belt by defeating Young Kendall of New Haven. From what I could discover, these boxers were the only two brothers to hold statewide championships at different weights at the same time. At the height of their amateur careers, "Tony" and "Flip" both fought as Golden Glovers in Madison Square Garden in New York City.

I don't know if this feat has been equaled. "Flip" turned professional in 1940. As a professional, he made his debut that same year. He signed to fight Young Jack Sharkey of Norwich. That bout was the feature match, and it was held outside at Mercer Field. Many local boxing fans said it was going to be the fight of the century. In the middle of the baseball grounds at Mercer Field, a lighted ring was built. I wasn't there, but in his professional debut I was told that "Flip" gave a good account of himself even though he lost in his efforts. In 1942, just two years later, after months of illness, "Flip" Florio Lamont Andreas passed away.

Also in 1942, as with so many other young men, Anthony "Tony" Andreas enlisted in the Army. He was sent to the Pacific Theater of Operations where in a battle with enemy soldiers, the ex-prizefighter was peppered by shrapnel when a shell burst nearby. Only a few fragments of steel could be extracted and the remaining pieces of shrapnel were still imbedded in his body when Andreas was discharged in 1945. He died after a fall down a flight of stairs in January 1960.

Other New London prizefighters also distinguished themselves in the ring in the 1940s. Some remained in the area, while others eventually moved away. I. "Casey" Gillian stayed. "Kid" Jackson moved to Brooklyn. Lloyd Gillian moved to Hartford. "Monk" Gonzales moved to Norwich. Deanne Goodie moved to New Jersey and published a newspaper. "Pullie" Gomez remained in New London and became a contractor. I was fortunate to have known them all.

On athletic fields and courts, these individuals broke down many barriers. They were not alone. Black New Londoners also created political, social, and civic organizations to build cultural pride. These organizations, like the exploits of the athletes, helped to fight against the cancer of racism. The coming decades would see in New London the re-formation of a branch of the nation's oldest civil rights organization. It would also see the emergence of a national civil rights movement that found its way to the doorsteps of our city.

# TWO

## Organizations and Trailblazers 1920s-1940s

*In spite of the obvious discriminatory environment in the community  
many blacks took a long time to realize  
the impact of racism in the north.*

Because of discrimination against black people in New London, blacks formed organizations to aid each other economically, socially and politically. There were some groups of individuals who formed self-serving clubs. I've made little or no mention of them. I wanted to pay tribute to some of those individuals and organizations who went forward, despite antagonisms, with unselfish ideas of helping the poor, the needy, the disadvantaged, and those who because of their race or color were denied access to first-class citizenship.

Before my family and others arrived, the New London black population of the 1920s was sparse. I learned from Mr. Wilfred Coleman, who arrived in 1923, that some blacks owned businesses in the area. One of those was Rosa Shankle. She had a laundry on Main Street. Many other businesses followed. Edward Gilliam, Sr., operated a grocery store on Shaw Street. William E. Gambles was the proprietor of a tea room on Hill Street. Luther Eccleston, Sr., opened a pie shop on Home Street. And Mrs. Margaret Tyler ran a beauty parlor on Shapley Street. He also remembered a black dentist on Green Street and, in addition, there was a black attorney in town.

Coleman told me about two "hotels" (rooming houses) that accommodated blacks. One was called Jephtha House Hotel. Black transients stayed in these "hotels," especially the porters, redcaps, and dining car workers who lived in the rooms during their two- or three-day stops in the city. Coleman said that the railroad paid for the rooms, though some workers also paid to live in private homes. The dining cars were uncoupled here and the rest of the train would proceed north. The workers would wait here until trains headed in the opposite direction picked the dining cars left.

There are some organizations and individuals from the first part of the century that are little remembered now. Such is the case of the Colored Men's Progressive Club. Documents show the club's existence around 1913. The records show members considering buying Hempstead Street Hall. Prior to the NAACP branch as I knew it in 1956, blacks formed an early branch in the 1930s. As far as I can determine, that first branch lasted only a short period of time. It was basically an organization for men. If women were a part of it, I suspect they were not represented in any great numbers. In fact, I have not found one shred of evidence that indicates women participated at all. These men also wore several "hats" in the community. They were members of the Colored Men's Progressive Club, the Jephtha Masonic Lodge, as well as other

organizations within this southeastern Connecticut area. Most of those first local NAACP members have passed away.

Before the NAACP, New London had its black Elks. The black Elks were the forerunners of many black political and social organizations. William H. Baum, a member of the local New London Lodge, as well as a member of the Eastern Order, including Canada, offered some history of the local Elks. He told me he joined the local Elks in 1923. He said that the first New London Lodge was named Mohegan Lodge 235. Lodge 235 had been established many years before he came to New London in 1918. He told me in 1923 the Lodge was headed by a man whose last name was Burns. Baum noted that Burns was also reported to be the owner of the Jephtha House Hotel.

The old timers such as Baum helped close gaps in my knowledge about the lodges and early history of blacks in New London. Baum said because of the Great Depression in the early 1930s, some organizations became insolvent and that at that time, the Mohegan Lodge lost its charter. I also spoke with New Londoners Wilfred Coleman and William F. Johnson. Both told me they were former members of that now non-existent club. In fact, Coleman said he was a bartender there. There was to be no other black Elks Lodge in New London until the early 1940s. It was during that period that Victory Lodge 1096, Improved Benevolent, Protective Order of Elks of the World (IBPOE of W), came into existence. Initially located on Main Street, it later moved to 74 Green Street.

Thames Lodge 2642, Grand United Order of Odd Fellows, was organized in June 1885. Also in 1900, an auxiliary of that organization known as Household of Ruth 466, Grand United Order of Odd Fellows was founded. I could find no record of the parent Odd Fellows, or its auxiliary, Household of Ruth, after the year 1939. No one I had talked to remembered when the black Odd Fellows organization ceased to exist. Even Burchard Marshall, a former member who was 81 years old when I interviewed him, couldn't remember. The Lodge of Odd Fellows held their meetings on Thursdays at a place commonly known as Hempstead Street Hall, 66 Hempstead Street. That hall was also known as the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows Hall, and United Society Hall. In 1945 the Odd Fellows Hall became the Jephtha Masonic Lodge when the Masons bought the building.

Jephtha Lodge came into being in the early 1900s. Fifty-five years earlier, before Jephtha Lodge received its charter, a black Masonic Lodge, known as Eureka Lodge 2, F. and A.M., was established in Norwich. The Eureka Lodge had received its charter in 1859. (Apparently New London members of Eureka would travel to the Norwich meetings on foot or by carriage or, I suspect they sometimes went on horseback.) After traveling to Norwich for many years, New London area members decided to seek a Lodge closer to home. A dispensation was requested from the Grand Lodge. The Grand Lodge, meeting in Ansonia under the leadership of Worshipful Grand Master William. J. Nargett, issued a warrant, and the September 13, 1904, charter followed. The first class of candidates in Jephtha Lodge 11, F. and A.M., consisted of twenty-eight men. At the same time, the auxiliaries, the Craftsman's Club, and Electa Chapter 7, Order of Eastern Star, were also founded. Jephtha Lodge first met at Odd Fellows Hall when it was on Green Street. It was next to move to the Armstrong Building, located on Bank Street. The Lodge met there for many years until it moved to its present location at 66 Hempstead Street. The Jephtha Lodge of Masons has helped to lay three cornerstones in the City of New London: one at the old Shiloh Baptist Church on High Street, another at the new Shiloh

Baptist Church on the corner of Franklin and Garvin Streets, and a third cornerstone at Walls Temple AME Zion Church on Belden Street.

These groups and individuals—along with the powerful activist tradition of our churches—laid the foundation for our modern “Civil Rights Movement.” Our struggle extended to the armed services also. Black New Londoners fought for the U.S. during World War I. The list of black men from New London in the U.S. armed forces can be found in lists of U.S. veterans at the State Library.

In New London during World War I, individual citizens took it upon themselves to aid the less fortunate. The dean of social workers, Mrs. Elizabeth Jeter Greene, worked to aid the poor for over fifty years of her life. In 1917, she organized a group of young black women into an organization known as “The Canteen.” She formed the group because of her concern for black soldiers aboard troop trains that stopped in New London. White troops were well taken care of by white citizens. The city, however, failed to grant these same courtesies to black soldiers, so when black soldiers stayed in New London for several days, Greene provided valuable services such as dances, dinners, and lodging for the men. As the war neared its end, “The Canteen” became known as the “Negro Welfare on War Relief.” This organization continued to aid troops and also provided services for poor residents in the city.

After the hostilities in Europe, during the 1920s, the organization’s name again changed to the “Negro Welfare Council.” Greene became the first and only president. She and the staff helped with problems of rent, food, utility bills, and clothing, and since these services were temporary, people receiving aid often paid the Negro Welfare Council back in some manner. Also, through private donations and funds from the Community Chest, the organization sent black youths to summer camps. With her political and social skills, Mrs. Greene secured aid for the Welfare Council in its services to the poor. In addition, because of her political abilities, she eventually became a member of the Town Committee.

The Negro Welfare Council eventually voted to change its name to the “New London Service League,” since the New London Welfare Department duplicated many of the welfare services. The league then began to focus on disadvantaged youth rather than welfare for families. The league’s first president, Bennie McKissick Dover, continued the work of Mrs. Greene. She issued a 1957 report in which she noted that there were 145 paid youngsters in the youth department. The league’s programs operated on a four day, three hour, part-time basis. She said, “forty-five to fifty paid youth is the daily average.” Three hundred and fifty teen-agers used the Service League during its weekly four days of operation. Hours were extended to six hours on Fridays. At Friday dances, the attendance averaged one hundred children.

To encourage participation in youth activities, Mrs. Lottie Hill, Jimmy Epps, and other New London blacks devoted a significant amount of time to the young people. The Dover report stated that Mrs. Hill went out into the streets to encourage people to take part in league activity. Jimmy Epps, a player for the EB basketball team, coached the youth basketball team. Other adults supervised field trips for the children. The Dover report also indicated that “some parents want supervision of their children, but fail to come out and help supervise them.” She stressed the need for parental participation.

Following Dover's 1957 report, members elected officers and set committees. After the 1957 election, sports activities expanded to include tennis, chess, checkers, volleyball, and Ping Pong. They also decided to change the title of organizational heads to directors. McKinley Winston, L. Reginald Eccleston, Jr., and Clarence Faulk were all directors at one time. The board of directors of the League was integrated from its inception. Activities were conducted at the Hempstead Street Masonic Hall and the old Shiloh Church on High Street. Assistant Director Albert Garvin, Jr., supervised the youth in painting and cleaning of the old church facilities.

Another excellent example of dedication in this type of youth work can be found in the efforts of William E. Gambles. Gambles retired as a chief petty officer of the U.S. Coast Guard. As a military man, he was as unique as a person could be. Besides the Coast Guard, Gambles served in England's Royal Engineer Corps. Between the two countries' armed forces, Gambles served in South Africa's Boer War, the Spanish-American War, and World War I. After retirement, he also worked for the New York, New Haven, and Hartford Railroad. Gambles was a frequent participant in holiday parades in New London. He normally wore his uniform with its gold chief's insignia and gold hash marks along the sleeve. He served forty-three-and-a-half years of military service. Gambles had an intense love for his country and his people.

In the 1930s, Gambles took an interest in the plight of black youngsters, so he created a junior militia. I, along with other local young people, met at a back yard on Howard Street. We wore naval uniforms with leggings, and also carried rifles. Gambles taught us how to drill, march, and parade. The young militiamen participated in local parades. At times we'd just sit around at meetings and discuss current events, personal problems, recruitment tactics, or any other items of interest that could improve our organization or the individuals in it. Tag days were held to raise funds for operating and to purchase equipment and uniforms. In 1939 Gambles and the group raised funds so that they could attend the World's Fair in New York City. One summer Gambles arranged for the young men to go to sea on the Coast Guard training ship *Marsala*. Eventually, some of Gambles' trainees entered the armed forces during World War II. None of these young men trained by Gambles ever took a backward step. As an interesting aside, there were always rumors that Gambles was born in South Africa; however, I discovered he was born in Eufala, Alabama, in 1872.

Franklin D. Roosevelt, U.S. President during the Great Depression, through his New Deal programs, aided many area blacks as well as whites in their struggle to survive. Through the Emergency Relief Act (ERA), and later the Work Project Administration (WPA), people such as Dorothy Robinson worked to survive in the 1930s. Like so many others, she had to go to work under one of those subsidy programs. But unlike so many others in those programs, Robinson was a skilled stenographer, qualifying her to work in most public or private offices. The City of New London hired Robinson, but she was paid out of subsidy funds. Needless to say, if the city had to pay, Robinson would probably not have been hired. There were many other cases like that of Mrs. Robinson's.

Robert Freeman Jordan was not in that category. He was an exception. He was black and a skilled machinist. Temptation is too great not to by-pass Mr. Jordan's ancestral past. Jordan Freeman, Robert Freeman Jordan's third great-uncle, and his brother, Lambert Latham, were Revolutionary War soldiers. Each had a different slave owner,



which accounts for the last name difference. Making note of Jordan Freeman and Lambert Latham in his book, *Before The Mayflower, A History of The Negro in America*, Lerone Bennett writes, "No less valiant were the defenders of Fort Griswold in Connecticut. When the British officer, Major Montgomery, was lifted over the walls, Jordan Freeman ran him through with a pike. Then, when Colonel Ledyard was murdered with his own sword, Lambo Latham immediately avenged his death by slaying the British officer." After his valiant effort, "the Redcoats pounced on Latham, who fell dead, pierced by thirty-three bayonet wounds." Such is the story of Robert F. Jordan's ancestors.

The great nephew of two American heroes, he was also the only black machinist that I could find evidence of in early New London history. Jordan was a machinist at The Connecticut Broach and Machine Company, located on Pequot Avenue, in New London. He learned the machinist trade at the New London Manual Industrial Training School. New London Manual, a local high school, later became Chapman Technical High School. Chapman Tech, as it was known, later became New London High School. In an interview with Jordan, he told me, "When I went to New London Manual Training School, which incidentally was a long time ago, I had my choice of courses." He also said, "The school taught courses in woodworking, blacksmithing, and machining. Those courses were for males. In those days, and only until the recent years when changes came, female students were not given the opportunity to take those courses. The girls only had the opportunity to participate in dressmaking courses. Many of those women did well and when they graduated became good seamstresses."

Jordan informed me that he did not like to work with wood. He reminisced, "I would tinker with blacksmithing sometime, but my first love was the machine shop. That's why I spent most of my time in school taking the machinist courses." When he graduated from Manual in 1913, white neighbors attempted to help him find employment. One of those neighbors, a banker living across the street from the Jordan family, tried to help. He tried to get Robert Jordan employed at The Ship and Engine Company in Groton. Company officials did not hide their feelings about blacks working there. They had no blacks working there, and they did not intend to hire any. The Ship and Engine Company was later to change its name to Electric Boat (EB) Company.

He said of this situation, "Of course I was disgusted by those attitudes. But I wasn't going to let a little setback like that stop me. I went up to Lynn, Massachusetts, to work for General Electric. That was where I took my apprenticeship. When I returned to New London again, I was a journeyman. But, don't you know, Ship and Engine still wouldn't hire me. Then, some of my white friends spoke in my behalf again. It was then I got the break I needed." His first job, upon returning from Lynn, was working in the Lapointe Machine Shop. He smiled and said, "I was all set then. I was here in town, working at my machinist trade until I retired."

Robert Jordan was later offered the opportunity to teach the machinist trade. He received a letter from Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Tuskegee offered him the opportunity to become an instructor. He was interested, but he could not accept Tuskegee's offer. At the time, he was the only one home with his grandmother and he was forced to decline.

After turning down the offer from Tuskegee Institute, Jordan faced another crisis. The Lapointe Machine Shop prepared to close shop and move to Massachusetts. The company wanted him to abandon New London for the Bay State. He declined and began working for the Connecticut Broach and Machine Company. He worked for that company for over 40 years. As far as I could discover, Robert Jordan became the area's first black machinist supervisor. Not only was his breakthrough personally satisfying, he also was a trailblazer for those who followed. Douglas Anderson and Stephen Manson aspired to be machinists and they also became employees of Connecticut Broach and Machine. Both became top-notch machinists in the New London area. Stephen Manson later went to EB and worked until retirement.

Another trailblazer from New London was William H. Bush. Several books could probably be written about Bush and his musical accomplishments. I met him in the early 1940s, but it wasn't until recent years that I discovered he was an accomplished organist. Bush played the organ at the St. Louis Exposition in 1904. That organ was reported to be the largest one in the world. Bush was also chosen to demonstrate a new organ at New York's St. James Episcopal Church before an audience that filled the church. Andrew Carnegie and Mark Twain were in attendance. He traveled throughout Europe, and he reportedly played the organ for the Queen of England. It was also reported that he had over 1500 pupils whom he taught to play the organ and the piano. In New London, for thirty-five years, he was a paid organist at the Second Congregational Church on Broad Street. And for another ten years, Bush was the organist at the First Baptist Church on State Street. In the Bank Street house where he lived, there were busts and portraits of Bach and Beethoven.

My knowledge of Bush, however, was discovered around the pool table. He would come into the pool halls carrying his two piece billiard stick in a canister. He wore a hearing aid, and people would say he couldn't hear very well, and at times one would have to speak loudly to him, but hearing and seeing are two separate things altogether. It's true Bush may not have been able to hear very well, but his sight in playing three-cushion billiards was the best. I never played pool with him because I didn't play three-cushion billiards. Moreover, I can't remember him playing anything except that game. He was as expert as anyone could be. He was slow and deliberate, and his opponent would often get angry with him. This was especially true when Mr. Bush would take several minutes walking around the table to line up a shot; then, after taking his time, he wouldn't miss. I remember the confrontations between Mr. Bush and Ellsworth D. "Wimpy" Bell. Bush and Bell alternated between "Pop" Ellis's Pool Hall on the corner of North Bank and Douglass Streets, and Beckwith and Tooker's on Main, between John and Douglass Streets.

There were other good pool players around in those days, but "Wimpy" and Mr. Bush were two of the best I knew. I do not remember which one of those two men could outdo the other. Ellsworth Bell was also one of the best pool players I had ever seen. I remember seeing Bell playing pool with different people, and his opponents were lucky to get one shot during the entire game.

Joseph Epps, Sr., was another pioneer and New London trailblazer. He, like Robert Jordan, Stephen Manson, and Douglas Anderson, grew in stature because of his accomplishments. Epps was a graduate of Howard University. He also graduated from

Cornell University with an MA in Civil Engineering with high honors. One would think, with those attributes, Epps' name would be engraved indelibly in New London's history. But unless one was living in the New London area in the 1930s, one would have never known what skills Joseph Epps, Sr., possessed. "He could have gone west and got a job," said his daughter Kathleen, "but he had a family. He didn't want to drag them all over the country." Mr. Epps was highly visible in the 1930s. But his visibility was not because the local white hierarchy was so generous. He was an assistant civil engineer and like the aforementioned Dorothy Robinson, he worked in the WPA program. As with Miss Robinson, it was only then that Mr. Epps was allowed to practice the trade for which he had so vigorously prepared himself.

If anyone wishes to see the results of Mr. Epps' work, all one has to do is begin on Williams Street in New London, follow that street north towards Connecticut College until it intersects with Route 32, then turn right on Route 32 and follow it until it ends. As the Assistant Engineer, "Engineer of Highway Construction," Mr. Epps headed the crew that was responsible for laying out Route 32, that served as the main artery between New London and Norwich and beyond. Although Route 32 no longer serves as the only road north of New London, it is still a well-traveled artery. And it became even busier with the emergence of the Mohegan Indians' Sun Casino. Route 32 runs right past the "Sun's" back door. It runs through Waterford, Quaker Hill, Uncasville, Montville, Norwich, and points beyond.

The family of Joseph Epps, Sr., fondly remembers him, but few others know of his existence. Mr. Epps has another accomplishment of which his offspring speak with pride. He was responsible for laying out a part of Lake Konomoc, New London's reservoir on Route 85, which now serves many communities.

With the outbreak of World War II came the end of the WPA. It also signaled the end of the civil engineering career of Joseph Epps, Sr. Taking small local part-time surveying employment, whenever and wherever it was available, was no way to care for his family of six. His family included his wife, Bertha, and his children—Joseph, Jr., Kathleen, James, and Louise. Without steady employment, Mr. Epps had a huge decision to make: He liked the New London area; it was a good place to raise children and for this reason, he abandoned engineering. Mr. Epps applied at Huntington Street's St. James Church for employment. The church hired him as their sextant, a position that was essentially janitorial.

### **High Paying Jobs Hard to Find**

High paying jobs were difficult to find for black people, as evidenced by the plight of Epps. Joseph Knowles, Sr., knew this quite well. There was but one black man working at EB Company when Knowles applied. Knowles, a retired Navy chief petty officer, related the following incident to me, "A Navy captain I had served with and who had retired told me to go to EB and apply for a job. I thought the captain knew what he was talking about," he said. "I thought he had some influence with those EB people," he continued. "Well, I went to apply," Knowles said. But when he went into the office, racism raised its ugly head. He introduced himself to a secretary and told her who had advised him to apply. The secretary called her boss to inform him that, "There's a colored gentleman out here to see you." Knowles knew that "as soon she said 'colored,' I didn't

stand a chance. I was right." EB began to hire blacks during World War II, but by then, the Navy recalled Mr. Knowles for active service. Joshua Baker, a men's room attendant, was the first black hired by EB. He was hired in 1939, after retiring as EB's general manager's golf caddy. After President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Executive Order 8802, my mother went to work at the plant. My grandmother, Rosella Gibbs, also went to work there. They were also domestics. Mrs. William (Frances) Johnson was the first black female machinist there.

Though many blacks were hired by EB during the war years, the end of World War II brought cut backs; consequently, the last hired black people were the first fired. I spoke with whites who worked with blacks during the war years, and they made the following remarks. One white person said, "I worked with blacks during the war. The blacks worked as hard as anyone else did. I'm glad someone is getting behind EB trying to straighten that company out." Another said, "They had blacks and women at the company during the war. After the war, EB acted like those people didn't have to eat."

I knew the statements were true because I was among the people fired. I worked on a rivet gang and part-time as a painter before being fired. While I was still a teenager, the U.S. Navy had drafted me into service. For some time, I had been concerned about being drafted and I had a right to be so. The experience was troubling and humiliating. For me, there was nothing right about the entire episode. My older brother Charles had been drafted into the Army. Most youngsters went into the Army by way of the draft. Those who went into the Navy were volunteers. Therefore, when they told me I would be assigned to the Navy, it was a shock. To make matters worse, I was sent to Bainbridge, Maryland, to cooks and bakers school to be trained as a mess attendant. That was a polite way of saying that I would be a butler for officers. I did learn how to make beds and wait tables. My way of protesting came by way of refusing to become a cook. The Bainbridge training facility was segregated. Blacks had their own barracks and they were supervised by white commissioned officers and white chief petty officers. When black sailors drilled with "arms," the rifles were wooden replicas. That was a far cry from what the white sailors drilled with. That was a way of life for blacks who spent thirteen weeks at those activities. After my training, the Navy sent me to Floyd Bennett Naval Air Station in Brooklyn. I was assigned to the Bachelor Officers Quarters (BOQ). That's where I got a break. I was one of five others to be assigned the job of master-at-arms. We worked in an office at the BOQ. With that assignment, it was almost a celebrity status. It meant no waiting tables or making beds. That was the enjoyable part of the job. Another part was we made up our own liberty schedule. We made it so that once in a while we would get 72 hours off. That meant I could come home on some weekends without obtaining an out-of-bounds pass. The Navy didn't want us traveling too far from the base on one or two days off. I spent a year in the Navy, mostly in Brooklyn. Upon being discharged, I returned home, and went to EB seeking employment. However, I was turned down on each and every occasion. I had returned to the area to face a bleak and uncertain future.

Russell Fields, an acquaintance, also found himself locked out of work at EB after the war. Fields had worked at the company, but he had been laid off. He was never to be recalled. A carpenter by trade and not wanting to give up, he kept applying to be re-instated at EB. Each time he was told the company had no openings for carpenters. The market for his other occupation was saturated as well. Like other black males at the time, Fields' other occupation was waiting tables. The war years had opened these jobs to

women, so there was less work now in that occupation. By luck, Fields met a white official from the Carpenters Union and friendship ensued. Fields saw an opportunity to break into the trade. He traveled to Carpenters Hall on a number of occasions trying to break into the union. "One day the guy asked me if I wanted to work at the Submarine Base. He told me they needed a carpenter up there. When I told him I was willing to see what would happen, he told me to try it and see. I met with the foreman at the base that day." Fields told the foreman that the union official sent him. "I said to him: I'm a carpenter." I thought I had just about killed my chances when the foreman shot back an unexpected reply." He said, "I told them to send me an apprentice, I cannot use you." Fields went back to the union hall to speak with the union official. The official instructed him to "go home, change clothes, then go back to the Base and tell them you're the apprentice I sent them." He told the official that the foreman would recognize him. The official said, "No he won't if you do as I told you and change your clothes." Fields changed clothes and returned in the afternoon. He relayed the official's message to foreman. The foreman told him to "get to work."

### Decent Housing Scarce

During the war years, blacks found that acquiring decent housing was difficult. My grandmother, Rosella Gibbs, wanted to purchase a home on Crystal Avenue; however, she had to work through a white intermediary to purchase the house. She never saw the inside of the house before she purchased it. I've even heard that white neighbors banded together to re-purchase a house upon learning that a black had purchased the house in their neighborhood. At other times, whites would circulate petitions to keep blacks from acquiring homes in their neighborhoods. It was also difficult for blacks to rent apartments. Most housing was segregated and dilapidated. Compounding the already tight housing crunch was the influx of military personnel and their families. The government built housing (Fort Hill Homes) for defense workers in the Poquonnock Bridge section of Groton, but the homes were not enough to accommodate the influx of workers. Most sought housing in New London and Groton proper, but black families did not have the options available to them that white workers had. Consequently they often settled for substandard housing.

On July 8 and 9, 1942, *The Day* reported on the plight of William E. Taylor, a black EB worker. Mr. Taylor's New London residence on Main Street was condemned, and he was ordered to vacate the premises. Taylor applied for lodging at the defense housing facility near EB. That housing had been specifically built for those who were shipyard employees. But, as the facility housed only Caucasian workers, the black man was turned away. Taylor went so far as to get a high company official involved in the matter. The rental agent, denying that racial discrimination was involved in the refusal to take the man in, noted a problem would be created if he was to rent to the black man. The refusal of the rental agent, an obvious discriminatory act, caused The Reverend A. A. Garvin, then of Shiloh Baptist Church, to write a lengthy letter in protest to *The Day*.

In the 1920s, '30s, and '40s, there were a handful of black families living in the Fort Trumbull, mid Broad Street, Hope Street, and lower Hempstead Street areas. Black families also lived on Bank and Brewer Streets. New London had its predominantly black section of town. Permanent residents found themselves competing with black Navy men, merchant marines, and defense workers for the limited housing.

Housing choices were so narrow that if a black family needed to move, frequently they only moved around the corner. Easily exploited because they had limited choices, black families found themselves subjected to warped floors, peeling paint, falling wall plaster, falling ceiling plaster, bad plumbing, drafty doors, and broken windows. (I remember when falling plaster smashed down on a little black girl living on Main Street.) Whites owned most of the slum dwellings; nevertheless, whites blamed blacks for the condition of the housing.

Government building projects such as the Gold Star Memorial Bridge exacerbated housing problems of blacks. The construction of the bridge uprooted a number of black families from the Main Street and Crystal Avenue section. The hardships of moving continued during the 1960s, after the city began to clear families for urban renewal. We sometimes referred to it as “urban removal.” Redevelopment was a struggle for blacks for years. This struggle remained etched in the memories of local black people.

Sally Ellis, who came to New London in the 1930s, remembered the war years well. Her husband, known as Almer “Pop” Ellis, operated a billiard parlor. It was first located on State Street. Later, he relocated to North Bank Street. Sally Ellis was 91 at the time I interviewed her in 1987. She remembered, “[The workers] would come into town looking for a place to stay. That shipyard across the river was hiring them for the first time and they wanted to get a job there.” She further recalled that, “They, like all the rest who applied for yard work, wanted to make some of that good money. I didn’t blame them. The workers got the jobs all right, but even though they had the job, they had no place to stay.” Mrs. Ellis said that “Dad [Almer] used to tell me that the blacks would come into the billiard parlor. And, having no place to stay, they would bring their food with them and eat it there.” Many remained until “Pop” closed the parlor. Mrs. Ellis said that some people even wanted her husband to let them sleep on the floor of his business; however, he didn’t because he might lose his license.

“Pop” Ellis genuinely felt sympathy for the plight of the men. Many of the men slept wherever they could find lodging. Some slept in automobiles. “Pop” Ellis turned a condemned building across from the Learned Mission and Day Nursery on Main Street into housing for defense workers. The bank owned the building, and consequently Ellis asked them to repair the building because his people needed lodging. The bank only did enough repairs to keep the dwelling livable. Ellis said that the effort was a “big help to so many of those workers.” Her husband had enough beds in the rooming house to hire a married couple as janitor and maid. “Pop” sometimes “rented the same bed to men working different shifts,” Sally Ellis recalled. “When one of the men got out of the bed to go to work, I’d put fresh linen on the bed for the man just getting off work. Sometimes you would have to be a magician.” The men needed a place to sleep and “Pop” provided it for them. “Pop” Ellis left New London in 1954 for Kansas City, Missouri, where he opened another billiard parlor. He later opened a barbershop there. Mr. Ellis wasn’t the only one supplying lodging for the EB workers. James H. Brown, a member of many black organizations, and principal owner of the Hempstead Street Hall, made beds available upstairs in that facility for those in need.

The influx of people housed by individuals such as “Pop” Ellis and Jim Brown gravely concerned some of New London’s “solid” citizens. I was first told that the “concerned” group was composed of both blacks and whites. Later, I was told it was only

whites. I never heard of anything materializing from this group because the Navy soon began to make cutbacks, which resulted in massive layoffs at EB. Blacks were the first to be fired. With little hope of being recalled, many blacks left the area. This outward migration alleviated some of the pressure in New London's "Little Harlem," as New London's ghetto was referred to. This area was located around Main, Shapley, Hill, Douglass, Richard, and John Streets. It also included Schoolhouse Lane and Mather Court.

### **Unwritten Social Codes Deny Service**

The reality of ghetto life extended beyond "Little Harlem" because blacks realized that certain dance halls, restaurants, and hotels would deny them service without overtly posting signs that indicated "black or white only." Prior to the 1938 hurricane, which demolished Ocean Beach, New London's unwritten social codes denied blacks access to dances posted as open to the general public. These general codes did not allow blacks inside the dance hall and often blacks were not allowed to stand outside to listen to music. My mother recalled that when "big bands used to come to Ocean Beach, we would go and sit on the grass sometimes or try to look through the doors. We were trying hard to get just a peek at them." She further related, "Sometimes we would just stand around outside and listen to the good music coming from the building. Then here comes a cop to chase us away." My mother said that the cop would say, "Either leave or go to jail." The blacks would make the trek home in disgust rather than risk jail. People such as Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Fletcher Henderson, Cab Calloway, Louie Armstrong, Jimmy Lunceford, Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw, Erskine Hawkins, Billy Eckstine, Charlie Barnett, Lionel Hampton, Nobel Sissel, Fats Waller, and others led these big bands. The exclusion policy stood regardless of the skin color of the artists.

Kenneth Talbot and Sophie Phipps, New London residents, corroborated my mother's statements about blatant discrimination. Talbot remembered those days, "Your mother told you the God's honest truth." The police also chased him away from the dances. He added, "If anyone tell you any different about it, they're telling you a lie." Mrs. Sophie Phipps, a native of Waycross, Georgia, and a city resident since 1926, related that in Waycross, "When something was going on at least we could get in. Whites would at least let you sit in the balcony and watch." Upon returning to Waycross, she "Couldn't help telling people down there about how New London was." It was natural for Talbot, Phipps, and others to want to see and meet the bands. Some local blacks met big band leaders after the dances ended.

Blacks were not the only group barred from moving into certain neighborhoods. New London's establishment hindered mobility of Jews in the city. Unlike blacks, Jews could change their names to non-Jewish ones to get around barriers. During the 1930s, the Jewish community was closely knit. I was told that some people rejoiced after the hurricane of 1938 destroyed the "Jewish Quarter." There was a reason for that title. Prior to the hurricane, Ocean Beach was littered with cottages and "shanties" on its waterfront. During the summer months, Jews from all over Connecticut and I suspect from other states, occupied those dwellings. They would flock into Ocean Beach with their children and servants. Some New Londoners resented those occurrences. I think, because they were Jews, bigotry played a part in that resentment. I say that because, the non-transient Jews couldn't get any closer to the beach than Plant Street. And if the bias was so strong, it is easily understood why certain people rejoiced when the results of the hurricane were

in. But non-Jews were not the only ones happy to see the destruction. A Jewish female told me she was very happy the cottages and “shanties” had been wrecked by the storm. She told me that those beach buildings were a shame because they were an “eye-sore” which needed to be removed. My grandmother mentioned a referendum that some people wanted to pass to keep Jews out of Ocean Beach. Her employer asked her if she planned to vote to keep Jews out of Ocean Beach. She said to us, “I told her I wasn’t going to vote at all. If they don’t want Jews at the beach, I know they don’t want me either.” The referendum banning Jews from Ocean Beach did not pass. According to my grandmother, the referendum wasn’t specifically worded for Jews, but it meant the same thing. I’ll never forget the expression on her face when she related that story. She was so right in so many ways. However, in general, black people continued to bear the brunt of the local whites’ discrimination.

A local black, Abraham Mason, met with vicious racism after he attempted to open an independent taxi company. He told me, “I caught holy hell trying to get a license.” Mason eventually cracked the taxi color barrier. Later, he owned and operated a Gulf service station on the corner of Church and Main Street. I have found no indication of a black person being that deeply involved in the gasoline business before or since.

The late 1930s and 1940s were an extremely tense period nationwide. Black leaders often found themselves in a quandary. In 1943, The Reverend Garvin wrote the words below in a letter to support *The Day’s* portrayal of crimes committed by blacks in New London. Garvin may have felt the letter was necessary given the war overseas. The much-respected Garvin was attempting to mollify racial tensions. The Detroit Race Riot in June 1943 certainly was on his mind. Garvin was one of the people recommended for membership to the Inter-Racial Commission (IRC). This commission is now the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities. I agree with the Reverend’s feelings, although I do not believe I would have written a letter of praise.

#### *Expresses Shame of Negro People In Recent Crimes*

*I wish to take this means to publicly express my sincere appreciation to the judge, the prosecuting attorney of our police court, and to the police department for their fine, judicial, speedy and unprejudiced handling of the brutal, criminal and sordid acts recently committed by members of my race.*

*The Christian, respectable and law-abiding colored citizens of New London have been shamed and shocked at those wicked crimes. They are alarmed at the baseness of the acts, and their deepest sympathy goes out to the victims of the degenerate individuals who may be found responsible.*

*It is high time the responsible white and colored citizens got together on some program of community uplift for Negro youth. The minds of our youth are not immune to the vicious influence of some of the many strange people coming to our city. I do not say that all of them are bad people: many are as good as our own people. Some, for instance, are connecting themselves with local colored churches. But some of these newcomers, I fear, pay no attention to the church and some are definitely a very bad influence on youth. The colored churches are anxious to welcome and*



*help these people—the young men and women who are coming to our city for work because of the war industries here.*

*We know that without the Christian church influence in their lives they are more likely to get into trouble. It is true of our own boys and girls here in New London. The colored people of New London unfortunately do not go to church in large numbers, and it is not only hurting their lives but it may well hurt their children's lives. For colored people of New London are a fine people and would be finer if they would turn to religion for assistance.*

*There are many fine Christian colored servicemen here but the commanding officers should tell any other element, not so well behaved, that the belief that the wearing of the uniform of the armed forces gives them license to do as they please is utterly false. The individual in the service who will not accept discipline, and who will not discipline himself, will find that the law is able to deal with him.*

*I want to thank The Day for the calm, unbiased way it reported those shocking crimes. There was nothing inflammatory in the news stories—just the shameful, terrible facts. Many papers throughout the nation can draw a lesson from the local report of these cases and thereby help prevent the riots and hatreds that often arise from these things.*

*A.A. Garvin, 8 Home Street, New London. September 4, 1943*

Instead of praising those entities, I probably would have condemned the newspaper for attempting to incite a riot.

The paper also ran a potentially volatile article that referred to a woman as having a romantic affair with a “Negro.” That article was to backfire on the paper. The “white lady” wrote a rebuttal letter to the paper in protest. She told the editors she was “the legal granddaughter of a full-blooded Negro Grand Army Man.” The paper, replying to the letter, said it had received the erroneous information from official and reliable sources. A number of the post-World War I riots against blacks resulted from assertions that black men associated with white women.

As for Reverend Garvin, after his letter, he changed some of his tactics. Not that he condoned crimes blacks committed, or were charged with, but he changed his perspective about how the papers reported them. The newspaper headlines were insulting and degrading to blacks in general. As a result, and in spite of the possible consequences, Reverend Garvin took the lead in trying to curtail degrading headlines.

Such headlines, I feel, were the destroyers of black aspirations. Phrases such as “Dangerous Negro Maniac,” and “Razor-toting Negro” described incidents. Even the most insignificant news was highlighted when it came to reporting “Negro” suspects or convicted law-breakers. Or for that matter, even some who hadn’t broken the law. Many times the headline did not refer to race or color. That was taken care of in the article’s details. For example, “A colored laborer,” or “Negro domestic,” did this, that, or the other. These are but a few such references I’ve seen.

Because of the discriminatory climate in the city, Reverend Garvin was basically unsuccessful in his efforts. He eventually found an ally in Reverend Oliver Bell, the white pastor of the Methodist Church on Broad Street and together the Reverends Garvin and Bell began protesting the racial discrimination appearing in local newspapers. But their combined successes were minimal and short-lived. Reverend Bell became angry after repeatedly being snubbed and ignored. He had put his prestige and ministry on the line by deciding to exert pressure on the establishment. Reverend Bell, however, kept that pressure on at least until those demeaning racial references ceased.

I learned a great deal from the Garvin/Bell newspaper confrontation. I realized that, although blacks could accomplish some things as individuals or groups of individuals, they must have visible supporters from the white community. If that could be accomplished in numbers, I realized the chances of achieving our goals would be much greater.

The papers also had the distinction of running employment ads that stipulated racial preferences, such as "White wanted" or "Colored maid wanted." Such advertisements were not beneficial to blacks seeking equality. I considered those ads, and the many other biased headlines about black crimes, as crimes themselves.

City establishments sometimes initiated more overt crimes against black New Londoners. Around 1942, Skipper's Dock, a restaurant owned by a southern white man, Sidney Wood, opened in a plush gray building on Masonic Street. The owner reportedly moved to the city because of gas rationing. The restaurant with its ramp looked like a dockside eatery. Like the Mohican Hotel, blacks worked at Skipper's Dock, but they couldn't eat in the restaurant. Early in May 1944, an integrated group attempted to be seated and served in the restaurant. William and Harriet Weaver were a part of that group which Skipper's Dock refused to serve. They continued, however, to push for entrance, and, finally the restaurant management offered service in a side room. The main dining room was obviously off limits. The group refused the service. They left and took no further action.

On May 21, 1944, William "Buddy" Hollaway telephoned to make reservations for four. William Johnson, Paris Barton, Daniel Brown, and Willis Franklin, all local blacks, went to the restaurant. Hollaway did not include himself. He only made the call. After being refused service, the four invoked the state's General Statute of 1941 section 860-F, which outlawed discrimination in public accommodations. The group left the restaurant and went to the police station to file a complaint against owner Sidney Wood. The police investigated and turned their findings over to Prosecutor John J. McGarry. McGarry issued a warrant for the arrest of Wood. Ten days later, the police arrested Wood. The court scheduled his trial for early June. The defendant asked for a postponement, which the court granted until June 15, 1944.

This trial was the first in New London for violation of the state's anti-discrimination law. Attorney Joseph LeCount, a NAACP representative, came from Providence to represent the four men. Judge Max Boyer heard the case. Interested blacks filled the courtroom; some even lost time from work to attend the trial. Others assumed that there would be no prosecution. But they were wrong. There definitely was a trial. During the proceedings, Attorneys Frank McGuire and Henry Harris, lawyers for Sidney Wood, referred to the four men's charges as "defective," and asked that they be dismissed. Judge

Boyer denied the motion for dismissal. LeCount argued for conviction on the grounds that a conviction “would prevent the spread and growth of intolerance.”

Judge Boyer also initiated a series of questions of his own. He wanted to know why the men sought to eat at Skipper’s Dock? He seemed to be searching for a reason to dismiss the case. He asked each plaintiff, “Were you merely snubbed? Were the restaurant employees too busy to serve you, and had you waited for what seemed to be an unreasonable time, or were they not busy and just let you wait?” The judge’s questions continued. He asked, “Were you going there with the knowledge that you would be refused to be served?” Paris Barton responded, “We all expected to be served just as any white person would have been served.” In later years, William Johnson told me that Judge Boyer was no friend. I can well believe it because of Boyer’s words. He said, “Well, I’m trying to find out if you people just went to Skipper’s Dock to see if this law works. What I mean is, did you go into the restaurant knowing you would be refused to make a test case out of it to bring it to court?” He continued with, “If you did that, you would be law-breakers yourself, and you could be in danger of being tried for entrapment.” Sensing the danger of the moment, Attorney LeCount leapt to his feet and objected to the judge’s line of questioning and comments. LeCount said to the judge, “Your honor, there has been nothing introduced in this case to show these men had gone to the restaurant for any reason except to eat.” After his statements, Judge Boyer ceased his question about entrapment. LeCount spoke boldly on behalf of the four blacks:

*I feel strongly that the germ of intolerance, if planted, as in this instance, will grow strong if not checked by proper action. If the violation is not punished in this instance, and in this place, other places will be encouraged to display similar discrimination, and soon, there will be no place other than those operated by their own people, where the colored people can be given the equal rights to which they are entitled.*

LeCount completed his statement by stressing that the defendant could not be freed with evidence so overwhelmingly against him. Judge Boyer’s concluding statements and rulings upheld the law. However, it only amounted to a slap on the wrist. Boyer believed that, “The cure for racial or color intolerance does not lie in criminal prosecution.” This brought a gasp from LeCount. The judge thought the owner “palpably guilty,” but he also felt that “criminal prosecution is not a cure, but on the contrary, breeds discontent, resentment and often-times hatred, and is apt to do more harm than good.” Judge Boyer, speaking more as a politician than a judge, stated:

*There is principle involved which goes beyond the violation of a criminal statute and the question of good faith certainly enters into the situation. The statute has clearly been violated and it is not for me to decide anything other than such violation. However, the enforcement of this statute raises the question when it is a cure for intolerance.*

Judge Boyer indicated that he held sympathy for black people because they are many times the underdog. He also informed the courtroom that his friendship for blacks was well known. (He should have said that some of his best friends were black.) Regardless of his friendship, he had reservations about the case. He fined the owner \$20 and remitted \$10 of it. He believed “the way to end intolerance will never be cleared by legal

penalties.” In my opinion, the fine was of little importance. The trial and conviction mattered most. Each time I interviewed William Johnson about the case and other things, he never failed to mention that he had also initiated a civil suit against Skipper’s Dock. However, he said he didn’t know where the suit died, but he would say, “It died somewhere along the line.” I believe Mr. Johnson blamed Judge Boyer for seeing that his lawsuit case never reached litigation.

During that era, if a black person was out-going at all, there was no way to escape the humiliations of the day. In many instances, blacks mentioned the humiliations only among friends. Many blacks didn’t like what had happened to them, but felt it was a waste of time to say anything publicly. Here are two examples of what was occurring in the black man’s world in New London. One involved Albert Garvin at Woolworth’s on State Street. I also remember an incident in which I was involved in a Bank Street restaurant. Many black citizens felt more comfortable by ignoring a racial snub than by speaking up. I suspect some of that mentality exists today, although on a smaller scale.

Garvin’s incident involved a strawberry sundae. Woolworth’s advertised a strawberry sundae on sale and Garvin, who loved that particular flavored sundae, was drawn to the scene. He was not exaggerating when he said he literally tasted the sundae on his way to Woolworth’s. Sitting at the counter, Garvin waited his turn to be waited on. But, although he waited, other patrons came, sat down, and were served. Garvin sat through it all, still waiting. Finally, after witnessing sale after sale to others, he could take no more. “Do I have to come behind the counter and make my own, or are you going to wait on me?” Garvin asked. A female sitting at the counter sympathized with him. “I don’t blame you for telling her that,” the lady told him.

When a friend and I went into a Bank Street restaurant one evening, we experienced a similar situation. The difference was, no one was at the counter and no one else came in. A waitress passed us several times without acknowledging our presence. We also sat and sat. After awhile, it became crystal clear what was going on. I had no intentions of walking out, but I believe that’s what the waitress wanted us to do. We talked among ourselves, but said nothing to the waitress. Even though it was humiliating, sitting without being attended to, we continued to play the game. And the game lasted until another waitress emerged from another room. I presumed that other room was the kitchen. When the new waitress neared the offending waitress, the offender said, “Take care of those two ‘shines’ over there.” There was no mistaking what she had said because her words were as clear as a bell. “Where’s your boss?” I asked. The new waitress said the boss was in the back. I told her I wanted to see him. She went through the door from which she had just emerged. She soon returned, followed by a man. We said nothing. The man said he didn’t know why the other waitress said what he had been told she had said. He apologized to us. We left the restaurant without ordering anything. My friend had said nothing until we were on our way outside. What he told me was, “I didn’t hear anything.” I almost flipped, and was glad nothing had happened for which we could have ended in court. My friend told me later, “My mother told me to never get involved in a white/black situation.” I have no idea what would have happened if we had to go to court, and he was a witness.

In the face of such blatant discrimination, blacks developed institutions to deal with their plight. In the 1920s, bellhops, waiters, and porters from the Mohican Hotel had formed the “Bellmans Club.” William H. Crocker, Sr., captain of the Mohican bellmen,

served as the head of the Bellmans Club for years. The reason for the formation of the club remains murky. What is known, however, is that black men and women employed at the Mohican Hotel knew that, although they worked at the hotel, dining there or obtaining lodging was not possible. They couldn't even rent the hotel's facilities for entertainment purposes. The events the Bellmans planned were the largest entertainment for blacks during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. They held the Bellmans Ball at Plant Hall on State Street and at a hall on Bank Street. The black "Who's Who" came from within and outside the state. And later, when the Bellmans moved the event to Ocean Beach Park, the crowds grew larger. The out-of-towners came by limousine, train, bus, and other modes of transportation. Locals, if everything else failed, walked to Ocean Beach. Those Bellmans Ball evenings were special. Black women wore their best evening attire, while black men came dressed in tuxedos.

The Ambassadors Club was also flourishing at the time. Old-timers remembered the Ambassadors as a mixture of formal and informal dances. The Bellmans were noted for drawing in out-of-staters. The Ambassadors drew from a pool primarily of local residents. Even if that was so, reports of those who remembered the club say the club held its own. Some of the Ambassadors were Jimmy Anderson, Dillsworth Harris, William Baum, and Surjest Akers. At one time, William Popham was president of the club. Henry Johnson was vice-president. Harvey Place was secretary. Dallas Scott was the club's treasurer. Edward Scott and Richard Lancaster, Sr., served as publicity chairmen. It's obvious those men wore at least two hats. Most of them were employed at the Mohican Hotel.

The shame of it all, as with the sports teams of color, was that these groups were allowed to die. But the reason for that is obvious, I believe. There was a war that had to be fought, and the country needed able-bodied men. Most of the men of the two clubs were of conscription age. Therefore, if they were healthy, they were sure to wind up in the military. And that's exactly what happened. When the Craftsman Club, an auxiliary of Jephtha Masonic Lodge, came into being, knowledgeable people told me that the later club came pretty close to equaling the Bellmans and Ambassadors. The Bellmans and Ambassadors Balls, and other black sponsored evenings out gave black New Londoners the opportunity to withstand the harshness of life behind New London's color line.

In addition to the Bellmans and Ambassadors Balls, Robert F. "Bert" Jordan and his Rhythm Kings captivated white as well as black audiences in the 1930s. The band consisted of pianist Robert F. Jordan, drummer Walter Davis, banjo player Irving "Casey" Gilliam, saxophonist Charlie Lewis, trombonist Joe Lewis, and trumpeter Billy Epps. Andy Pangilinan joined the orchestra to play the banjo after Gilliam left the group. The Rhythm Kings, the only all-black musical group in this area of Connecticut was very popular. The band's engagements consisted of everything from one-night stands, to three- and four-week contracts. The band had the distinction of playing at establishments that are still in existence today. Norwich Inn, The Morton House, Ferry Tavern, and the Hempstead Street Hall are places the band played at. They also played at Floral Park, the Pease House in Old Saybrook, Cinderella Inn, Thomas Hardy Inn in New London, and Little Rest in Mystic. Little Rest was owned and operated by Alden Wilson, a black man.

In the early 1940s, Robert Jordan's work schedules began to limit his ability to participate in the group's engagements. So, Albert "Bootsie" Brown took over the band on a more permanent basis. With that move came the end of an era. The Rhythm Kings

became the “Bootsie” Brown Orchestra. As older instrumentalists retired, younger members were added: Clifton “Cliff” Carter (drummer), Carlton Kydd (alto and tenor saxophone), Henry Kydd (trombone), Ernest Kydd, Jr., (bass), Rudy Saunders (piano), Harold Kydd (trumpet), Norwich’s Joseph Delgado (guitarist), and Frank Delgado (singer and tenor saxophone). Near the end of the “Bootsie” Brown era, Wally Rogers became the trumpet player. The band lasted more than 40 years.

During the World War II years, all across the nation, United Service Organizations (USO) sprang up. USOs were manned by civilian volunteers to provide entertainment for United States military personnel. When I was stationed in Brooklyn, at Floyd Bennett Field in 1945, I visited the USO in New York’s Harlem section. It was at that unit that I discovered Palmetta Symington, one of the hostess volunteers. Miss Symington was from New London and I had known her prior to entering the service.

With the U.S. submarine base in Groton, the U.S. Coast Guard in the area, and New London being a port for the U.S. Merchant Marine, there were at least three USOs in the area. One was on Coit Street, another at the lower end of Huntington Street, and a third at the YMCA on the corner of Meridian and Church Streets. And all were segregated. Those New London USOs were as “Separate but Equal” as anything that I have ever seen. That was because when one race met at a particular site, the other race met at the other.

But that did not stop racial conflicts. In New London and in other local areas, there were racial fights between service personnel. The fights were mostly between southern whites and blacks, regardless of where the blacks were from. That was, without a doubt, the fault of the U.S. government policy of maintaining segregation. Although blacks were on bases and ships with whites at the time, they carried the stigma of being forced into becoming mess attendants and stewards. That was like a badge of dishonor, which led to ostracism. And naturally, that was followed by resentment and turmoil.

But there were other conflicts that had nothing to do with race. There were inter-service animosities and conflicts. And when the civilian dislikes were added to the mix, it was a genuine round robin. The Navy didn’t like the Coast Guard or the Merchant Marine. The Coast Guard didn’t like the Navy or the Merchant Marine. The Merchant Marine didn’t like the Navy or Coast Guard. And there were the civilians who, for one reason or another, didn’t like the servicemen. The military police, the shore patrol, and the local police departments were kept busy during those years. A black woman who grew up in that era told me, “The white sailors from the South used to insult us something awful as we walked down the street. We didn’t have to say anything to them. They just started picking on us.” I would imagine such incidents were responsible for at least some of the racial altercations of that period.

I discovered that Mrs. Mary Talbot was one of the volunteers for the USOs in New London. In a Thursday, July 8, 1943, edition of *The Day*, the paper mentioned Mrs. Talbot, along with my relative, Miss Mary Brown, and other women, including Mrs. Daisy Bright and Mrs. Edith Rose. The general chairman of the volunteers was Mrs. Ruth Leeks. Miss Bernice Sanchez was chairman of refreshments. The newspaper article said that over 200 black service personnel and fifty hostesses were involved in “a successful dance and social” the previous evening. There was a jitterbug contest won by Alfred Downie of the Merchant Marine, and Miss Ida Nixon. Another maritime sailor named

Walter Thomas and his partner, Miss Louise Stevenson, won the "Spot" dance contest. That affair was held at the Huntington Street USO.

That same Wednesday evening, some white servicemen were dancing to the music of the Fort Wright Band at the Coit Street USO. The newspaper also reported there was to be a full-length movie at that site on Thursday. And on Friday, the Coit Street USO would also be the site of a dance. Music would be supplied by Dick Benvenuti's band. The paper further said that on Wednesday there had been another USO dance for white servicemen at the YMCA. Hub Neilan's orchestra had performed, as did Danny Small, a black musician. On Saturday, the paper noted, blacks would be having their affair at the Coit Street unit. They would be having a Ping Pong tournament.

Mrs. Talbot remembered those days in a recent conversation. I gave her a copy of the newspaper article without telling her what it was about. After reading the article, Mrs. Talbot reacted in a way that surprised me. She said reading the article was exciting, but at the same time, there was a down side. "All those people are no longer with us," she said, "And that's sad." She was right. Miss Brown, Mrs. Bright, Mrs. Rose, Mrs. Leeks, and Mrs. Thomas, nee Sanchez, were all gone. I did not know Ida Nixon. However, I knew Louise Stevenson. I have no idea what happened to Miss Nixon or Miss Stevenson. Mrs. Talbot spoke extensively of those bygone days and the activities of the USO. I never mentioned the racial strife among the servicemen, although I witnessed some of those altercations. Mrs. Talbot didn't mention it either.

Daniel Small, who was mentioned in the article as a vocalist, was known to me as a pianist. I had no idea he was also a singer. When he moved to Chicago, he became a member of the nationally known black orchestra of Lucky Millinder. After Mr. Small passed away, a memorial service was conducted for him at New London's Shiloh Baptist Church. My mother was deeply involved in that effort.

Also in the 1940s, Joseph V. Watts, known as "Tiny Fats Watts," opened Tiny's Heatwave. "Tiny" was by no means a small man. He stood over six feet tall and weighed over 325 pounds. This renowned bass fiddle player had jammed with his Swing Masters at local nightspots before opening his club. His group played at the Atlantic Beach Casino in Misquamicut, Rhode Island. In Connecticut, the group played in Niantic and at the Mohican Hotel and London Terrace in New London. In August 1944, Watts gave a free concert on Ocean Beach's boardwalk. Tiny's Heatwave then opened officially on September 12, 1944, at 388 Bank Street. This center of entertainment remained hot into the 1950s. It was during this time that "Tiny" fell ill. But his wife Alice continued to operate the establishment until the 1960s.

In spite of the obvious discriminatory environment in the community, many blacks took a long time to realize the impact of racism in the north. Older black residents recalled the brainwashing they underwent. One resident said, "We were victims of a good old brainwash job. We were white oriented." Others thought, "We were doing all right back in those days. Or at least I thought we were. Now thinking back over those years, we were just doormats. I don't want to think how stupid we were." Another man used the phrase, "I sure hate to be repetitious, but we've come a long way, baby." These reflections are not exaggerations. Many times I had to bite my tongue on issues of race.

During the post-war years, my visits to the State Employment Service were particularly hard. The service had a special interviewer for blacks. I dreaded visiting the interviewer because she deliberately sent black people to menial jobs that paid little. She would call you in and say, "You're looking for a job." Then, she would grab her file cards to impress me and say with a smile, "Here's a job and the people are very nice to work for. You take this card to this place." I always imagined the internal giggle she had after handing me the card. On occasion, she said, "It's a nice dish-washing job and you probably will get a raise after awhile." Always trying to get ahead, I'd ask, "Is this the only job you've got?" Her reply was, "You don't even know these people, they're real nice." I often commented, "Well I thought you would have something different. I don't want a dishwashing job. I would rather shine shoes." Many blacks hated going to the employment service. She sometimes sent me out as a laborer at construction sites. I arrived on a number of occasions just a little late. The bosses would tell me "You should have been here yesterday," or, "We just hired someone this morning." I worked a number of jobs such as construction at the Submarine Base, making sandwiches at The Candy Mart, setting up pins at the Thames Club, cleaning tables at the enlisted men's cafeteria, and working in the officer's club at the Submarine Base.

I eventually landed a full-time janitorial job at the officer's club working in the Nineteenth Hole, a recreation area at the club. My brother Major, who worked as a dishwasher, helped me get the job. The boss explained the duties and it was mine if I was interested. I took the job. The pay wasn't that bad. I cleaned the area twice a day. With the time left over from the cleaning, I helped others with their jobs. My hours were different from the rest of the workers because most were waiters. It was mandatory for them to be around for all meals, particularly the evening meal. One day while I was cleaning the Nineteenth Hole, a meeting was in progress. Such meetings were not unusual because they were held almost every morning. I didn't vacuum the floor because I didn't want to disrupt the meeting. Winter was approaching and the Navy brass and the boss were trying to determine what to do with the golf pro. My boss said, "I'm thinking about placing him on the dishwashing machine." This was my brother's job.

After hearing this, I told my brother to watch his step. He worked extra hard but he was never able to satisfy the boss. With the onset of winter, the boss brought the golf pro in to run the dishwasher and fired my brother. When Major came down to my workstation with news, I put my work aside and went to see the boss. He insisted that Major and I still had jobs, while at the same time Major had his termination slip. He stated that we both could stay. I informed him, "I don't need your job and Major doesn't either." I told him that I had overheard their meeting. He admitted that he knew that fact. I told him that Major was responsible for me being on the job. He said he realized the situation and accepted everything I told him. We both left. We found work two weeks later in the enlisted men's cafeteria. I really didn't want that job but it was steady work. Major and I cleaned tables and kept the cafeteria clean. I tried to like the work, but it just seemed mentally taxing and degrading. My feelings would have been altogether different, if blacks were not forced into these positions.

The 1950s would see a few more jobs opening for blacks. Places such as EB, Charles Pfizer, garages, and a few unions would begin to open up for minorities. It would also see the dawning of a new era nationwide and locally.



And it finally appeared as if New London was on the verge of opening its employment ranks to people of color. New London's first black teacher was just around the corner. However, before that event occurred, another apparent break-through was on the horizon. This is the story as it was told to me about New London's first black police officers. William "Billy" Goode, a former resident of the now demolished Shapley Street, enlisted in the Navy in 1944. He was sent to Hampton, Virginia, for training as a boatswain's mate. Prior to his military time, he was an active basketball and baseball player. Goode, as has been noted, played basketball for the Yergans, and he also played baseball for the Whales. He began playing for the Whales as my father was preparing to hang up his spikes. Goode was also a part of the waiter brigade of the earlier years. He worked as a waiter at the Mohican Hotel and other establishments. After being discharged from the Navy, and returning to New London, he returned to the waiter brigade or to any other type of work he could secure.

In 1949, after hearing exams would be conducted for openings in the New London Police Department, Goode decided to try his luck. New London had never had a black policeman before, but he wanted to try even if he had to be turned down. "I had a little age on me," Billy told me, "but I decided to take the exam anyway." Maurice "Mo" Yates, another black, who had been employed at EB during the years when it wasn't fashionable for blacks to work there, was also interested in police work. It was that interest which prompted him to also seek to take the exam. He had determined being a police officer would not interfere with his employment at EB. In 1949, Goode and Yates took the police exam and passed.

They were, therefore, the first black policemen in the history of the City of New London. Donald R. Sloan, who was to become chief of police in 1980, scored highest on the exam. Captain John J. Courtney, head of the department, recommended fifteen supernumeraries, including Goode and Yates, to become a part of the department. Additionally, others recommended were: Donald T. Murphy, Richard E. Johnson, Austin C. Matson, William G. Crocker, John P. Sheehan, Lawrence M. Saunders, Thomas F. Harkins and Joseph F. Paskewich. When they were offered full-time status, both blacks refused. "I had a lot of time at EB, and I didn't want to lose it. That's why I didn't become a full-time officer," Yates told me. "I had too many irons in the fire," Goode said, "and I wouldn't accept full time either. Besides that, I thought I was too old to take a full-time police job." Goode later opened a Shaw Street rooming house. He also was the operator of the Rosemont Café. It wasn't that much later after Goode and Yates made their debuts as the city's first police officers, that Wilson Horner became Groton's first. Nearly a half-century later, Waterford fell in line by employing Oliver White, its first black police officer. Goode told me recently, "Hell, I was thirty years old when they decided to let us in. Earlier it would have made a big difference to me. I liked being a policeman." Maurice Yates, who was a white-collar employee at EB, as he had planned, completed many years at EB, then retired. But before he did, Yates and Goode had broken the ice in the police department.

# THREE

## Life in the 1950s: Dawning of a New Era

*...a local group emerged with foresight.  
That group, called the "Civil Rights Club,"  
had an enormous amount of guts...*

The 1950s were a decade of what I call some incredible changes, even here in New London. Changes, or breakthroughs, usually come about in times of crisis. Those crises are usually global conflicts. New London breakthroughs were the hiring of its first policemen of color and its first black school teacher. The "Brown v. Board Education" decision in 1954 brought hope for black people throughout the country, and though there was legislation on the books to help blacks acquire jobs in previously closed occupations, there was still a lot to accomplish in the area of civil rights for blacks. Another positive step was in 1956, when an up-dated New London branch NAACP was organized.

Personally, I was rejuvenated by some of those occurrences of the 1950s, even though there were also very low periods at this time. For one, a devastating, personal blow struck me in August 1950. Four years earlier, on my discharge from the Navy in 1946, I had joined the Naval Reserves. In 1950, the Korean Conflict roared to life, and I feared that I might be recalled. In the years since my discharge, I had not participated in any Naval exercise. I was a totally inactive reservist. So, at times, I thought that my fears were unfounded. Even so, I scanned the papers to see what might be in store for me. The papers reported, "There are no plans for inactive reservists at this time." This news article lessened my concern and I began to believe that there was not much to worry about. I was misled. On August 22 or 23, 1950, I received another invitation reading, "Greetings from the President of the United States. You are hereby ordered to report on, or before, September 5, 1950." I had less than two weeks to put my affairs in order and report to the Naval Receiving Station in Brooklyn. I gave a week's notice at work because I wanted to get another week's pay. After reporting to Brooklyn, I was transferred to Green Cove Springs, Florida, and assigned to LST 529.

During World War II, I had shore duty as a master-at-arms at Floyd Bennett Field, but things would be different this time because I would now be aboard ship. My co-master-at-arms at Floyd Bennett Field had been Freddie Wilson, a graduate of Kentucky State College who joined the Chicago police after his discharge. He eventually brought himself to tell his wife and family about his "other" work in the Navy. He had told them that master-at-arms was one of the best jobs on the base, that it required typing, record keeping, and other office tasks. He often said, "It was a total embarrassment to tell anyone that I also waited on officers." I felt the same way. It took me years to tell anyone what my job duties were. Even now, when I think of it, I sometimes become bitter about my time in Florida and Virginia.

Like all the other ships in Green Cove Springs, the LST I was assigned to lacked power. Consequently, it had to be towed to a civilian dry dock. That dry dock was at Gibbs Shipyard in Jacksonville, Florida. In that city, “colored” and “white” only signs marked drinking fountains and filled Jacksonville’s streets, docks, and shipyards. To sailors of color, that was the rawest of reminders of the segregated South. Unlike Green Cove Springs, where I never went out of the gate for liberty purposes, the situation was quite different. Green Cove Springs was a military establishment, therefore, it wasn’t necessary for me to go to town. We had a mess hall and laundry facilities right there on the base. Gibbs Shipyard was not a naval facility. It was a totally private enterprise. So when we went down the ship’s gangplank, we were on private property. And knowing that, black sailors knew their place. And that “place” lasted until we were back aboard ship. White shipmates could walk out of Gibbs and find all they wanted on either side of the Jacksonville streets. Black sailors had to take segregated busses to find food in the city’s black sections. Though there was little the Navy could do about segregation and discrimination in Jacksonville, it did control the environment at the shipyard where it spent its money.

Our cook, Bill Leyko, was from Norwich. We became friendly during my stay aboard ship. The lack of power on our ship made it impossible for Leyko to cook. We both walked out one evening to get something to eat. I was headed to the segregated bus to travel for a meal. I paused, waiting for the traffic to cross the street, when Leyko grabbed my arm. He tried to pull me into Tompkin’s, a restaurant frequented by white shipmates. I was not ready to be that type of hero. I told Leyko I’d see him back at the ship later. He obviously wasn’t thinking because during our little tug of war, a crowd gathered to watch. They thought we were fighting. He suddenly realized where he was and released my arm in embarrassment. The cook began to apologize to me for his mistake. He had forgotten Southern customs.

Since I had always spoken out on problems that plagued black shipmates, I was not surprised when the division officer singled me out. The officer said, “Bland, I fixed it so that you boys won’t have to go so far from the ship to eat.” He didn’t need to say more but he did. “I have talked to Tompkin about you boys eating in there,” the officer continued. “Tompkin,” he said, “would gladly serve us three meals a day.” When he finished, I asked, “Did Mr. Tompkin tell you where the ‘boys’ were going to eat? You know it makes a difference whether the ‘boys’ eat in the kitchen or dining room.” I explained to him the best way I could. “If the ‘boys’ are going to eat in the kitchen, then we expect to pay less for our meals.” The division officer looked genuinely hurt. He answered that he had not discussed that issue with Mr. Tompkin. I informed him that the matter dictated further discussions with Mr. Tompkin. That was the last I heard about the situation.

The time came when I almost wished I had accepted the Jim Crow accommodations. I reported late to the ship after eating dinner one evening and my division officer threatened to restrict me to the ship. I told him I realized that I breached regulations and was willing to suffer the consequences. I told him that someone would have to bring my meals aboard ship. In addition, someone would have to take my laundry ashore. He never discussed the subject again.

Eventually, this situation caused me to disobey an order. My entire section, excluding me, went ashore one day. I was basically the only one left. I decided to stay in

my bunk. I heard two people coming down the ladder and recognized one of the voices as a ship's chief from Missouri. I remained in my bunk as if asleep. The chief said to someone else, "Watch this!" Then, "Hey Bland," he said to me. I did not move so he repeated his statement. I rolled over. He said, "Bland, I want you to get up and clean the compartment." He had been on board long enough to know I would probably not consent to his order. I knew I would not do as I was told when I saw another man with him, a civilian worker. I told him my section was off. It made no difference to him. I repeated that I was off duty. He, however, expected me to do it. I protested, but the chief continued insisting that I clean the compartment. After a while, realizing that I wasn't going to do his bidding, he put me on report.

I was given a hearing and restricted to five days aboard ship. By this time, the ship was seaworthy. We had steam aboard and I didn't mind being restricted for those five days. I had stood on my principles. Being restricted, as far as I was concerned, was well worth it. The ship's captain had been in Texas on leave when the episode occurred. He returned after my restriction was over. Had the captain not brought the subject up, I doubt if I would have. The captain and I had a good relationship. He would talk about his personal problems and I guess the only reason he listened to me talking about racial problems was that I listened to him. He said, "I hear you got into a little trouble while I was away." I said that it wasn't anything major. But I did explain to him why I didn't clean the compartment. He told me he wished he had been aboard when the incident happened. I don't know what he would have done if he had been aboard. I feel that he would have had no choice except to back his chief petty officer. He told me that I should have cleaned the compartment and then complained. I disagreed. I told him, "Captain, if I had cleaned that compartment, there wouldn't have been anything to complain about. The compartment would have been cleaned." I had no more problems in Florida, but we weren't there very long. After workers repaired our power problem, the ship left for Norfolk. Its eventual destination was San Diego, California.

While on the base in Norfolk, I tested the parameters of segregation and discrimination. The Navy sanctioned the two through their policies. The Navy roped off sections of the cafeteria. Navy personnel ate in an integrated environment, while civilians ate in a segregated environment. I always ate in the white civilian side. No one in Norfolk ever said anything to me about this action. I don't think anyone noticed. I thought that if black civilians had taken their coffee into the white section on a continuous basis, the signs for the two different sections would have been removed.

We left for Panama in February 1951. We stayed in Colón, on the Caribbean side of the canal for a few days. There was an incident between a gunnery officer and myself. I had gangplank watch when some of our officers arrived with guests. They brought with them a large palm leaf. They looked a little tipsy to me. I opened the wardroom door for them. The gunnery officer returned a short time later. The officer had a peculiar smile on his face. I knew trouble was brewing with women aboard. He and I had never had problems before, but I suspected something amiss when he asked that I come to the wardroom to do him a favor. I could have gotten in serious trouble for leaving watch even for a few minutes. I asked what he wanted. The peculiar smile reappeared on his face. He wanted me to step into the wardroom, stand over him, and fan him with the large palm leaf while they took pictures. I don't think he expected me to question him. He seemed embarrassed. "Sir," I told him, "If you knew me, you would know that you would

have to order me to do that, and I don't even know whether an order would do it." I wished he would go away. The officer stood there a long time without moving. I did not know what was going on in his mind. But I could visualize me standing over him with a palm leaf, while they were taking pictures. I tried not to become angry, but if he wasn't going to order me, why wasn't he leaving? Then I figured he was thoroughly embarrassed, and had found it hard to leave. I imagine he had told the others he would get me, and that they were going to have some fun. He eventually went back inside before others from the ship began to arrive. I have often wondered, just what he told those people in the wardroom on arriving without his servant. After he left, I laughed to myself and tried to put the incident out of my mind, which was hard to do. I thought he should have had better sense than to ask me to do something like that. I didn't appreciate him thinking of me in that way. After all, he was younger than I, although that probably should have had nothing to do with it.

The ship then went to San Diego where my enlistment expired. This was a pleasant surprise because I hadn't known how long my recall was to be in effect. They asked me if I wanted to ship over, or join the reserves again. I had been burned once too often. All I wanted was to get that paper that said I was out. I caught the first train home. On my way back to New London, I wondered though about the job I had left at the cafeteria. I did not want such a job again. On that three-day train ride, I wondered—without any answers—what kind of work would actually be available. Arriving in New London, I found my three childhood friends had returned to the city in 1950.

### **Three Childhood Friends Return**

Reginald Eccleston, Norma Suggs, and Albert Garvin, Jr., had gone South in 1949 to teach. Eccleston, who was born and raised in New London and educated in its school system, was the leader of that group. Eccleston had graduated from New London's Bulkeley High School in 1944. He sought employment at EB and was hired. It was during the war, and he went in as a burner. Soon he was transferred to the rivet gang. While working in the shipyard, he saved his money for college. He enrolled in Alabama's Tuskegee Institute, but was able to complete only nine months. His education was interrupted by the call to arms and he was drafted into the Army. Following his discharge in 1946, he returned to New London, but soon he was back at Tuskegee, determined to get his degree. He had a desire to work with children. During his summers while in college, he sought employment in the recreation department of the New London school system. New London had never had a black in that department. For that matter, at the time it probably had never had a black in any other department. The city did not want one then. He was turned down. This pure act of bigotry caused Eccleston to seek employment elsewhere. He needed money to meet his educational goals. One summer, he went to Vermont to work in a restaurant named the Green Shutter Inn. Another summer he worked at Sullivan Motors in New London as an automobile preparation man.

For a while Eccleston worked two summer jobs and also attended summer school where he was befriended by Mrs. Beatrice Cook. Mrs. Cook was married to New London resident Hoke Cook, and she came to New London from Georgia during the summer months. She held the title of Jeanne's Supervisor in the Georgia school system. Even though the Georgia school system was a segregated one, Mrs. Cook offered to help Eccleston. He listened because he wanted to teach black children. When he completed his four years at Tuskegee, he returned

home. During the summer of 1949, he thought about his ultimate goal: obtaining a master's degree. That fall of 1949, Eccleston returned to Tuskegee.

After receiving his Masters in Education, he returned to New London once again to seek a teaching position. His experience with the New London Recreation Department made him realize that, as a local black man, the place where he was born, raised, and educated offered him nothing. The New London school system rebuffed the proud Eccleston again. His degree was useless in the city he called his home. He, like other blacks before him, had a decision to make. Eccleston pondered his future. If he continued to remain in New London, it was not a very bright one. He was well prepared with a degree from Tuskegee Institute. If everything were equal, Eccleston could have held his own with any of his white contemporaries. But in 1949, everything was not equal. Eccleston was only one example and Suggs and Garvin were others.

Norma Suggs was also a product of the New London school system. After graduation, she followed the traditional pattern of so many black females before her. She graduated from school only to be steered into house cleaning jobs. That was the pattern for black women in the late 1940s and Suggs was no exception to that rule. Albert Garvin, Jr., also graduated from New London's school system. When his high school days came to an end, Garvin followed the traditional pattern prescribed for blacks. He worked at the Old Saybrook resort, the Pease House, as a busboy. Garvin's job entailed setting up and cleaning off tables and a small amount of waiting tables. Then he learned to drive. As a result, Garvin took a job driving a truck for the Troy Laundry. Garvin said he lucked out on that job because so many young men had been called into the service. But his truck-driving days were short lived. He was drafted into the Army. Following his discharge, Garvin returned to New London. With no job at hand and no prospects, he enrolled in college.

Remembering Cook's offers, Eccleston talked to Norma Suggs and Garvin. They all knew Mrs. Cook, who also offered them her assistance. The three left New London that year to find decent employment in another state. Other blacks left New London for similar reasons, some of them never to return.

Eccleston and Garvin had purchased a used automobile. They had intended to use it just to travel around New London. Now they wondered and worried about whether it was sound enough to make the trip. Should they try to sell it? After a long period of time deliberating, they decided they would need a sound automobile in the South. Their automobile was checked thoroughly and repairs were made as necessary. It was pronounced fit for highway travel. The three friends, with the car loaded with their belongings, took to the highway, headed for Ocilla, Georgia. Eccleston said the automobile held up very well. He said the trip was uneventful, with the exception of the "colored" and "white" only signs that greeted them below the Mason and Dixon Line. Mrs. Cook, aggressive, impressive, and dynamic, had made all the arrangements for them. Al Garvin was to say of Mrs. Cook, "She certainly knew her way around."

The trio trusted Mrs. Cook because she knew the ways of the South, and she handled herself very well. She briefed them on the ways of southern traditions and was helpful on many other accounts. The three transplanted teachers, learning quickly, had nothing but praise for Mrs. Cook. They paid strict attention to her. After a teaching stint in Ocilla,

Suggs and Garvin returned to New London. Eccleston said he did not follow because, "I had other unexplored territories to conquer." He left Irwin County, headed northwest to the County of Troup, and landed in La Grange, Georgia.

Although Eccleston was no longer under the wing of Mrs. Cook, her past guidance was still his motivating force, influencing him well for future tasks. Although his residence was in the city of La Grange, Eccleston was a teacher in the rural outskirts. Like the traditional country preacher, he was the traditional country teacher. Earlier, while pursuing his college education at Tuskegee, Eccleston met and became the sweetheart of Arena Prince. Miss Prince hailed from Birmingham, Alabama, and was also entering the teaching profession. Marriage was the next step, and the duo of L. Reginald and Arena Eccleston became a teaching team in the rural schools of Georgia. In the 1950s, they would return to teach and eventually work in the New London area.

The pair were finally able to get teaching positions in New London because of the diligent efforts of Bennie Dover Jackson. Bennie McKissick Dover came to New London in June 1947 with her husband Frank Dover from South Carolina. Frank, who was a courier for the New London Federal and Loan Association, passed away in 1968 and Bennie married Selvyn Jackson. Bennie worked previously as the teaching principal at the Mike's Creek Elementary School in Cherokee County, South Carolina. A South Carolinian by birth, she graduated from high school in Easley. Following her high school graduation, she enrolled in Seneca Junior College in Seneca, South Carolina. After junior college, she enrolled in Claflin University in Orangeburg. After graduating with a BS degree, Bennie McKissick Dover received an appointment in a school at Mike's Creek.

For three years, 1947 to 1950, Bennie Dover continued her studies in teaching. She was well aware of the New London school system's practices concerning black teachers. Attempting to crack the prevailing all-white system of New London, she met with constant discouragement. "Our father often told us not to give up when we know we're right," she told me during our interview. Mrs. Dover said she knew she was right. That's why she was so persistent in her efforts to crack the color barrier in the New London school system. She was trying so hard. As a further discouragement, a person working in the school system told Mrs. Dover that, "We don't have colored teachers here, so why don't you go into doing day work."

The person told Mrs. Dover, in effect, to hire out as a maid or a household servant. "I knew they didn't want me," she said, "but I wasn't going to stop trying." Bennie told me, "I kept going back because I was determined not to go into anyone's day work. That's not what I had been educated for." After her continuous prodding, in 1950 she was allowed to be a substitute teacher. Mrs. Dover substituted at different schools, but never at the all-white Harbor School. Whether it was intentional or not, she was never assigned to teach at Harbor. At any rate, she got one foot in the door. As a substitute teacher, she had advanced farther than any other black in the New London system. She obtained full-time status when she signed her contract for 1952. By signing that contract, Bennie M. Dover broke a time-honored tradition—and the walls of bigotry came tumbling down. For twenty years she continued to teach. During her tenure, she also became Head Teacher at New London's Waller School. She also proudly taught black history at New London High School.

As a sidelight, which to me was ironic, I discovered a totally unrelated, but interesting fact. While Bennie McKissick Dover was becoming New London's first black teacher, her cousin Floyd McKissick was becoming the first black student to attend the University of North Carolina Law School. He won a court case against this North Carolina institution. Floyd McKissick also became one of the major leaders of Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) during the 1960s. Years later, he became one of the nation's strongest proponents of "Black Power."

Wallace T. McKissick, brother of Bennie McKissick Dover Jackson, came to New London in 1957, ten years after his sister. His credentials would have made anyone proud. They included: funeral home assistant in Gaffney, South Carolina; Licensed Funeral Director and Embalmer, I.G. McKissick & Son, Union, South Carolina; diploma in Mortuary Science, and a BS degree from Benedict College in Columbia, South Carolina. With this background, McKissick considered opening a funeral parlor in New London. Because of state law requirements, McKissick would have to work as an apprentice in Connecticut for two years.

Without this requirement in mind, Wallace McKissick applied for a position in one of New London's leading funeral homes. He had assurances of a job from the owner of the establishment, but when he arrived to begin his job as an apprentice, he was told the plans had changed. It wasn't absolutely necessary he work in a funeral parlor, although he would have preferred it to something else. After being shunned by the funeral parlor, McKissick next applied for a position at Charles Pfizer. "We'll call you later," he was told. "Their call never came," McKissick said in an interview. He was next to apply for a position at EB. EB termed him "over-qualified." McKissick tried applying at other places, including a garage. He said they wanted to hire him as a car washer. He turned the position down. After exhausting himself, he applied for a job at Seaport Manor and was hired there as a waiter and busboy. Here again was a black person, not in the 1930s or 1940s, but in the late 1950s, and this time with a BS degree, finding out what the area had to offer most blacks. In 1957, with the employment of his choice denied him, he was forced to accept an inferior job. It was not the end of the road for him. Wallace McKissick persevered and continued to try to break tradition. He tried other areas within his educational background but was turned away.

Someone suggested that he investigate the school system, preferably New London High School. He told me, "I had tried everything else, so why not try the high school?" McKissick wrote to the New London School Superintendent, after which he wrote and requested his transcript from Benedict College. Everything should have been easy from there, but it wasn't easy at all. He received a letter from Benedict College informing him that his transcript had been forwarded to the State Board of Education in Hartford. Upon receiving the letter, McKissick journeyed to Hartford to pick up the transcript. At the State Board of Education he was told they had no such transcript. But after he presented his letter from Benedict College, the "misplaced" transcript was quickly found. The State Board of Education officials showed McKissick a list of vacancies in schools across the state.

According to the list shown to McKissick, a vacancy existed at New London High School. New London High needed a biology teacher, and he had a degree in biology. At the insistence of his sister, Bennie Dover, he took action. Bennie had urged him to apply for a teaching job. McKissick went to the New London superintendent's office the day



following his visit to Hartford. Although the list he had seen in his visit to the Connecticut State Board of Education office showed a vacancy, he was told by the New London superintendent's office that no such vacancy existed. "That position has been filled," he was told. McKissick didn't like what he heard, but he had no choice except to leave the superintendent's office. On his way out the door, the secretary called to him. She asked if he had been to the high school principal's office. His answer was no. The secretary told him to see the principal. McKissick told me it was July and the weather was hot. "As I was on my way to the principal's office, I started to go out of the side door and go home. I would have gone home, too. But my mind told me to go see the principal, since I was already right there."

It was a good thing he followed his intuition. He went to the principal's office and introduced himself. He evidently impressed the person and he was invited to come in for an interview. During the interview someone was sent to the superintendent's office to get McKissick's application. Once the interview was over, McKissick was told he would be "the very man for the job." He was told to come back on Tuesday to meet the head of the Science Department. When the meeting took place, he was given a tour of the school, after which the principal reassured him he would be hearing from the school within a few days. It didn't take the school long to correspond. The officials sent him a contract for the 1957-58 school year. The very same day he received his contract, he received his certificate from the State Board of Education. It confirmed that he was certified to teach biology and general science. A requirement of the State Board of Education was for him to obtain a Master of Arts degree. Seeking to advance himself financially within the system, Mr. McKissick returned to college. It wasn't long before he met the school system's requirement and was awarded the Master of Arts degree he was seeking.

Wallace McKissick told me he "enjoyed over twenty-five years of teaching at New London High." He retired in June 1982. With intentions of keeping busy after retirement, Mr. McKissick applied for a part-time job at one of New London's leading funeral homes. He presented his resume to the director. The director told him they could use him part-time, and would call him shortly. Five years later, he was still awaiting that call. Mr. McKissick told me, "It seems the local morticians are determined to keep doors closed to blacks. This is in order to keep them from entering this lucrative field in New London." He later went to work part-time for the Fulton-Theroux Funeral Service.

Other trailblazers left the area permanently after short stays. E. Frank Ellis, son of Almer "Pop" and Sally Ellis, was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He went to public schools in Pittsburgh, and came to New London in 1935, attending local schools briefly. From New London, he went to Utica, New York, and went to Utica Free Academy. He attended two years at the University of Michigan and two years at Boston University where he received, in 1940, his Bachelor of Science degree. Entering Meharry Medical College in the fall of 1940, Mr. Ellis graduated in 1944 with a medical degree. Dr. Ellis interned at Kansas City General Hospital #2 in Kansas City, Missouri, and became Medical Superintendent (Administrator) of that hospital. Ellis is one of the successful people who lived briefly in New London.

Following in the footsteps of William Goode and Maurice Yates, Victor M. Johnson became the third black police supernumerary in New London's history. Supernumeraries were part-time police officers. He donned his uniform and put on his shield in 1954.

After listening to what Johnson had to say, I have concluded it was three strikes you're out. And for the average person, it probably would have been. But Johnson was not going to be out. He had made up in his mind and he was determined to make it. Johnson was a bricklayer by trade, and was working in the building construction trade when he became a rookie officer. By virtue of the hours a supernumerary officer worked, Johnson found he could continue in the building trades.

It wasn't easy by any means being on the police force. There were little things as well as big things that plagued him. Because he was black and in the minority, he felt that's what caused the hierarchy not to provide him with a locker. No provisions were made for him in that respect. It was a long time before he was provided one. Patrolman Theodore Kovalick allowed Johnson to share his locker with him. The locker was important to him, but no more important than the other matters. "They wouldn't let me drive the patrol cars," he said. "In fact," he told me, "it was three years before they would allow me to drive one." And there was bitterness in his voice and it remained as he told me about his weapon. "They said they didn't have a gun for me because there was a shortage," he said. "So I went out and bought my first gun. Then after people saw me with the pistol in the holster," he said smiling, "they wanted to know if it was loaded. You needed a gun on those dark and rainy nights," he said, the bitterness surfacing once again.

Johnson told how he was offered the job of full-time patrolman. "I don't think they wanted me to become full time. I just don't believe it. I say that because of the way they went about it." Johnson received a call on a Friday night. He told me he had to give a "yes or no answer right then and there," shaking his head in disbelief. "It was that caller telling me there was an existing vacancy for a full-time patrolman. That was all right with me," he said, "But to hear it was to be filled that coming Monday was something else altogether."

Johnson attempted to describe his feelings as a result of that phone call. One was a feeling of weakness, and the other was the feeling of betrayal. Johnson's problem was, he didn't know who was responsible. "I asked the caller some questions about the timing, but he couldn't or wouldn't answer them. They were all aware I worked construction. It certainly wasn't a secret, especially down at the station," he told me. "That's why I think the call came at the last minute for a quick yes or no answer. They knew they had put me on the spot and hoped my answer would be no."

Johnson said he tried to stall a bit, but knew it was hopeless. He also knew if his answer was not an affirmative one during that call, a no answer would have probably delayed him for months, or possibly even years. He finally answered yes to becoming full-time three days hence. He told me his yes answer was anything but a resounding one. But with that answer, Victor M. Johnson became New London's first black, full-time police officer. Over three decades have passed since that late night call came. Johnson is still impacted by its apparent implications. I asked him if he had been a victim of a conspiracy. He said he didn't know, but the way it was handled causes him to seriously wonder about the possibility. Johnson mentioned an interesting sidelight of his becoming full-time. "As far as I can determine, I'm the only one who never took a physical," he told me. A physical, he said, has always been a requirement preceding the appointment to full time.

Johnson thought over the previous years and then divulged another interesting tidbit. "You know, when I was made a corporal, they insisted that I take a physical. I remember

that quite well. I was a supernumerary then, and no supernumerary previously had been required to take a physical. Things had happened in the past that were upsetting, but that requirement for just me to take a physical was alarming. The Police Union got into the act and made a big thing of that fact," he said, concluding, "The union worked out an agreement which was mutually satisfactory to all concerned."

After seven years a supernumerary, Johnson became full-time in 1961 and gave up the construction trade. But that's not all he was to give up. He is a charter member of the New London NAACP Branch. When stories about the branch, because of its increased activities, were moved from the social pages to, or near, the front pages, it was to have a traumatic effect on Johnson. That effect on him began in late 1962 and peaked in 1963. Subtleties, hints, and innuendoes regarding the increase in local NAACP activity caused him to drop his NAACP membership. "Because I was the only black among them," Johnson said of white officers, "I heard all sorts of things. Some of them indicated I was a spy for the organization," he said, "so I dropped my membership." I knew the heat from our activities was affecting a great many blacks as well as whites, but I had no idea it had affected Johnson so critically. The surprising thing about that was, he had been membership chairman of the NAACP branch before I had ever thought about joining.

Johnson said he resented being sent out just to arrest blacks when a warrant came down. "No matter who else was sent, they would always choose me to go along." Johnson said the resentment came about because, no matter how many white officers were on the scene, "The black person being arrested would only see me." He told the chief "Never again" when he discovered he was one of three, out of a total of eighteen officers, called upon to identify blacks who had participated in a high school fracas. Because all of the eighteen were there at the melee, they all should have been called to identify participants in the fight. He felt as though he had been "used," and "I resented those things because they made me look like an Uncle Tom, ratting on blacks."

It was also quite interesting listening to Johnson confirm what I had already suspected and spoken about publicly. Certain white police officers had taken it upon themselves to keep white parents informed if their daughters were seen with blacks. I was familiar with this practice because I had brought it to the attention of Chief Francis O'Grady more than twenty years before Johnson confirmed it. We had received reports that white officers would phone parents of white females seen in the company of black males. Chief O'Grady said it was not police department policy for police officers to be informers. The chief replied to my inquiries by stating, "If any of them were doing it, they're doing it on their own."

As for Victor Johnson, when he became full time, he was the only black full-time officer for years. On October 14, 1968, Norm Soderberg, a New London *Day* staff reporter, wrote, "The Redevelopment Agency has a colored secretary and the New London Police Department has one permanent patrolman and one supernumerary who are Negroes." That supernumerary was David Berry, who later became a full-time patrolman.

I learned a great deal about the efforts and achievements of trailblazing educators and successful past citizens. However, late in 1951, I was running back and forth to EB and Charles Pfizer before the cold weather set in. I was looking to be hired. I was now a veteran of two wars. I remember thinking, on at least one occasion, that I should have an

easy time being put to work because of my military time. In hindsight, I was wrong to even think about that possibility.

But even as I was trying to find work, an organization was taking an interest in black employment. At that time, a local group emerged with foresight. That group, called the "Civil Rights Club," had guts and was primarily concerned with employment discrimination. I am not so sure the words "racial discrimination" were used in the group's quest. What I do know is that the usage of the words "unfair practices" was prevalent. But whatever words were used, in talking to former members of that group, they knew racial discrimination in employment was a huge problem. The organization was really a novelty in those days, but its members appeared to be light years ahead of others in their thinking. They did it without much fanfare. There wasn't any media coverage, which probably was the best thing that could have happened. Had there been news coverage early in that decade I don't believe the group could have handled the inevitable backlash. Who were those gutsy souls? What motivated them to become so bold? I had to find out for myself.

### **First Known Civil Rights Group**

Three blacks, Ernest Kydd, Jr., John Cosby, and Herman Nathaniel, sat one evening and decided to become "involved." The trio joined forces "to try something." They were only in their twenties, recently discharged from the military, and full of fight. But they were to find it easier to win a battle, or a skirmish, than to win the war. They considered their options carefully. They had their choice of other areas of combat. But when they were contacted by a black female who felt she had been shunned by the Telephone Company, the choice was made easy for them. As a result of that contact, the group, known only as the Civil Rights Club, made employment their sole purpose for existing. They discussed their new venture at length and decided to attack that single problem—employment of blacks in the greater New London region.

They specifically focused on the employment of Edwina "Tootie" Bright. Bright, along with her senior class, took a test as a high school student in the 1950s for employment at the Telephone Company. She was one of those who scored highest. If she wasn't at the top of the list, she was second best. With this in mind, she geared herself to become a telephone operator.

After graduating, she went to the company to ask when she would begin. Ms. Bright was told they were not going to use the list she was on. The company told her they were going to use a list from the previous year. But the company buoyed her hopes. She was told to come back at a later date. She did go back, and was told the same thing. Making a third trip to the company, and after being discouraged again, she contacted the Civil Rights Club. Miss Bright told them her story. Members of the group visited the Telephone Company and tried to persuade it to hire the young woman. The company rebuffed them in their initial attempt. But the rebuff did not discourage them. The members returned again to the company in an effort to mediate Ms. Bright's case. They were unsuccessful again in their efforts.

Ernest Kydd contacted Arthur Johnson of the state Commission on Civil Rights. Kydd knew Johnson during his days at Tuskegee Institute. Kydd told Johnson of Bright's

saga to see if anything could be done. Johnson made no promises, but said he would talk to Ms. Bright himself and get a complaint. At the time, the Civil Rights Commission was dealing with the Telephone Company in Norwalk, Bridgeport, and Stamford. "They had their policies all over the state," Johnson told me. The Civil Rights Commission knew what they were dealing with in Bright's case. Johnson said that it was "not just because I knew Kydd, but Ms. Bright seemed to have a good case. You know, we didn't have injunctive powers in those days, but we did have the power to subpoena and review records of the companies." Ernest Kydd told me he thought the commission "was going to drag its feet" in the case.

Arthur Johnson told me, "As soon as I got the complaint I began processing it. Additional complaints were just what we needed. That way we could show there was a pattern and that made it easier to get to the bottom of the matter. Bright's case turned out to be very easy." Johnson informed us that "The Company was very difficult at the beginning, but it became more conciliatory as time passed. That's why I said Miss Bright's case turned out to be easy." Kydd also told me the commission did not drag its feet. He said, "Art Johnson came into New London and it was all over." Johnson said to me, "She was determined to go to work for the Telephone Company and we were determined to help her."

John Cosby told me, "We were going to get involved in public accommodations, housing, and anything else we could get involved in, but when the young lady came along with her complaint we worked with that." I told Cosby Ms. Bright got a transfer and went into the Phone Company in Detroit. He was surprised to hear that. He was also surprised to hear that Ms. Bright was a supervisor, and she was still working for the Phone Company in Detroit. "Well, when she came to us determined to get that job, we were just as determined to see her get it," Cosby told me.

Kydd told me, "We called ourselves the Civil Rights Club. Not a fancy name, but we were dedicated." Both Kydd and Cosby told me they were ready to take on anyone at the time. Cosby said, "We were full of fire, even though I got into it late. Herman Nathaniel asked me to go to a meeting with him. I went and was interested. I had just come into the area at the time, but helping someone in trouble was my style." Mrs. Millicent McKinney was the second one at the Telephone Company, followed by Mrs. Karl (Jean) Kimmons. Then came Edwina Goode and Mrs. Vera Sebastian Levy, and others.

There was at least one oddity to the Edwina Bright story. I found out, to my amazement, that neither Mrs. McKinney nor Mrs. Kimmons had ever heard of Edwina Bright until I told them about her about forty years later. It was not until then they realized there had been a trailblazer who had made it easier for them. Mrs. McKinney, a former New York telephone operator, had imagined that she was the trailblazer. That was understandable, due to her being unaware of Mrs. Bright-Hemmingway's earlier presence at the New London plant. As Mrs. McKinney was already experienced, it is an undeniable fact, she was the first experienced black to be hired by the local company.

Ernie Kydd told me, "After we succeeded in getting Ms. Bright in, we waited for other complainants to come forward. We were open for business, and we were ready to try just about anything in the field of employment." Kydd would only say of future successes, "I don't know whether we could have had any more successes or not. We did

not get the opportunity to find out because no others came forward. That was unfortunate, but we understood the problem. We knew blacks were reluctant to complain. That has always been a problem. Even today. Well, when we didn't get any more complaints our Civil Rights Club was useless. You might say," Kydd continued, "for the lack of a better phrase, we died of apathy." "The Civil Rights Club operated for about a year, and then dissolved," Kydd said. "Before our group went out of business, others wanted to join. We had taken in about fifty members before we called it a day."

While Kydd and I were discussing Edwina Bright, we also reminisced about the 1940s, '50s, and '60s. Ms. Bright, unlike so many others before her and during her time, chose to remain in New London until she succeeded. Many blacks found it advantageous to leave New London. These included Frank Taylor, Charles Bland, William Jordan, Major Bland, Joseph Epps, Jr., Gilbert Coffey, L. Reginald Eccleston, Norma Suggs, Albert Garvin, Jr., Deanie Goode, Henry Fulford, Jr., Palmetta Symington, Joseph Lopes, Leola Lopes, Dominic Lopes, Alfred Gilliam, Myrtle Boone, Nathaniel Boone, Frank Brown, Pauline Brown, Catherine Lee, Lloyd Gilliam, James Sims, and Roosevelt Hyslop. These are but a few of the blacks who left the area to better themselves. As has been shown, some returned as permanent citizens. However, the majority did not return.

The decades of the 1940s and the 1950s seemed to have been the critical years. For those who left the area, the consensus was, "It was now or never." I have often been critical about the way black people were treated in New London. However, my history has taught me that nothing remains the same. The New London area is no exception. I have named blacks, who for reasons of their own left the New London area. They felt if they had not made their move when they did, they would not have made the move at all. But, as nothing remains the same, there had to be a reversal.

During those times, especially the 1940s to 1960s, other blacks were arriving. Many of those migrating into the area were to make their presence felt. Herman Nathaniel, a partner of Kydd and Cosby during the Bright episode, made his presence felt. He was later housing chairman of the New London NAACP. Nathaniel stayed about twenty years before departing for California. James Sims returned to become a successful real estate owner.

One of the early civil rights trailblazers was Ralph Hannon, a resident of the city since the 1940s. Hannon joined the traditional waiter brigade of that era. Arriving in New London with uncertainty, Hannon attempted to settle down. However, being of military draft age, he wasn't in the city long. As with so many others, he was called upon to serve in the Armed Forces. He served his time in the Army, and upon his discharge, returned to New London and rejoined the waiter brigade.

While in the Army, he thought hard about his future. He knew waiting tables was a dead-end career that offered no future rewards. Armed with the GI Bill of Rights, Hannon set out to make the waiter brigade a thing of the past. "I decided to go to night school," he said. "Because I could get into a program under the GI Bill. It should have been easy, but it wasn't," Hannon told me. "I thought because I had been off serving my country and had an honorable discharge that when I came back, there would be no problems. Besides that, I was eligible for financial aid under the GI Bill. I thought everything would be fine, and there was very little which could hinder me.

"But with all of those things backing me, I was still black. And they made me know it," he said dejectedly. Then, with the grimness befitting the times, he said, "I knew what I was hearing was true. I wanted to enroll in the Business School in New London. The word was out they didn't admit colored or Negroes or whatever the word they used for us in those days." He explained his feelings on the subject. "I knew I was black and I knew they had their policy against blacks. But I was a veteran. I applied at the school even though I knew their policy wasn't right by my standards," he told me. Ralph Hannon said they told him he couldn't be admitted because of their policy concerning race. "I got in touch with the Veteran's Administration in Hartford," he said. "I told them what a school official had told me about their policy." A Veteran's Administration official told Hannon to, "Sit tight and someone will investigate." Hannon said, "I had no idea what he was going to do, if anything at all. After I talked to him, at which time he seemed sympathetic to my problem, I just went about my business of 'waiting tables and sitting tight.'"

"It really didn't take the man long to get back to me," he remembered. "He came to my house for a visit." The man told me "they had a policy of not admitting Negroes." Hannon smiled. "He also said over half the school's enrollees are veterans, and the Veteran's Administration would pull all those vets out if I wasn't allowed to attend," he chuckled. "In 1949, I went to evening classes. Then I transferred to day classes and finished up. I went to the Submarine Base working for the Civil Service in 1952," he said. Hannon retired from the Civil Service's Department of Supervisor of Shipbuilding in 1986. He had one more distinction. He was also the first black Connecticut auxiliary state policeman.

Following the Kydd, Nathaniel, and Cosby civil rights group of the early 1950s, the mid-1950s produced the resurrection of the New London NAACP. The mid-1950s group, following the dictates of the national organization, needed fifty members in order to secure a charter. When the group held its organizing Charter Day, it had eighty-five members. The organizing meeting was held at 4 p.m., September 9, 1956, at New London's Bulkeley Junior High School. Charles S. Morehead, a life member, and also an official of the New Britain branch, was the organizing officer. Officers and executive board members were elected for a one-year term. New London now had a true, organized civil rights group. It still remains intact.

# FOUR

## New London's NAACP, 1950-1963

*I wanted to know how to go about dismantling a social system that had been in place for ages and which really showed no signs of changing.*

*What I am really writing about is the people who had the desire and the foresight to visualize the end of age-old customs.*

There have been many executive orders issued by our nation's chief executives; however, I truly believe that President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Executive Order 8802 in 1941 did the country a world of good. Because of World War II, I don't think black people would have taken continued social or economic abuse. Defense plants were paying excellent salaries and hiring millions. Before No. 8802, many of those plants discriminated against black workers. Executive Order No. 8802 held that "there shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or government because of race, color, creed, or national origin. And it is the duty of employers and of labor organizations to provide for the full and equitable participation of all workers in defense industries, without discrimination because of race, creed, color, or national origin."

Roosevelt issued the order because A. Philip Randolph, a civil rights activist and President of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, was threatening to "March on Washington." After Roosevelt issued number 8802, Randolph called off the march. I have no idea what form the racial unrest would have taken had not the president issued this order. Twenty years later, A. Philip Randolph got his March on Washington, August 28, 1963. It was he who insisted that the march take place. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC), CORE, NAACP, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Catholic organizations, Jewish organizations—all joined Randolph in his call for action; and other civil rights organizations, kicking and screaming, were forced into the modern civil rights fight as well. New London's NAACP participated in that March on Washington. I was proud to be among the luminaries and plain folk participating in the nation's most famous march.

Nationally, blacks found themselves bringing up the distant rear where defense plant contracts were involved, so EB, where I worked at the time, was not unique when it came to the lack of black employees. As a result of Order No. 8802, EB hired blacks in numbers. But there was a catch. The bulk of those jobs were welding, burning, and chipping. Of course, there were the traditional menial jobs at the company, with janitorial and maintenance high on the list for blacks.

I mentioned earlier that many blacks left the area near the end and after World War II. The exodus slowed to a trickle in the early 1950s. Black numbers in the area increased



again during the 1950s and 1960s because of the school desegregation crisis and increased racism sweeping some of the southern states. Others came as a result of EB, Pfizer, and other businesses. Combined with those who were already in the area, and those who were coming in as new residents, the stage was set for civil rights activism.

When I rejoined the NAACP, I did so at the urging of Mrs. Marjorie Brown. Marjie, as we called her, was the president of the local NAACP branch. Some years earlier, in 1951 to be exact, I had joined the NAACP. I was in the Navy at that time, stationed in San Diego. Realizing my chances of returning to California were remote, I allowed my membership to lapse, and really thought nothing else about the organization. My interest was rekindled, however, when Mrs. Brown spoke to me about the policies and goals of the organization.

She spoke about the lack of employment opportunities for blacks in our area and of the housing discrimination that blacks faced daily. I was already aware of many of these problems, but I was also aware of additional problems. If the organization were to do anything to improve the situation, I told her I certainly wanted to be involved. I suggested some solutions to problems that I had thought about for a long time. In addition, I told her that I was extremely busy with a full-time job at Roger Motors and a side TV repair business. I was concerned about joining the organization and then not being able to help. Brown dispelled those concerns immediately. She told me, "We know everyone cannot attend meetings because they have other obligations. But even if they can't attend, we need financial support." I agreed with her. Just about everything, if there is any hope of its functioning, needs support. I had not even given any thought to attending meetings, but it was a help hearing her say it wasn't necessary because I considered meetings boring. Brown's counseling words eventually resulted in my rejoining the NAACP. I'd think later about which NAACP work was best for me.

Around the time Mrs. Brown solicited my membership, I was at Clarence Faulk's house. Faulk called me because his television malfunctioned. I remember that evening well. At the time, the Faulks were living in an upstairs apartment on Bank Street. When I returned home later that evening, I did a lot of thinking on the subject of the NAACP. It was then I concluded that I could help the organization. And I could do it without sitting through meetings.

The following day at Roger Motors, and through the evening after work, I solicited members for the NAACP. I was really enthusiastic. The enthusiasm surfaced when I realized just how easy it was to get members. Some difficulties, however, did arise during my quest for new members. Some people had legitimate questions such as, "What is the NAACP?" Others, who knew of the organization, wanted to know what it was doing.

As a result of these questions, and others, I decided to back off for a while. It was early in my solicitations, but I decided that I had to re-group. I came to the realization that I would have to attend some meetings in order to answer so many questions. I felt that I had to be well equipped with knowledge of the organization so I could solicit memberships and, without hesitation, answer convincingly when questions were asked.

I also wanted the knowledge for my own personal satisfaction. I wanted to know what "my" organization was doing here on the local level. I wanted to know how to go about

dismantling a social system that had been in place for ages and which really showed no signs of changing. I wanted to know all of those things and much more if possible.

Initially, I brought in a large number of memberships. The next time I did the same and, to my surprise, I was offered the opportunity to join the Executive Board. Becoming a board member, I thought, would help me understand what it was like to fight the system in a group, and not as an individual.

I became a member of the Executive Board in the late 1950s. I had made it clear by my membership drive that I wanted to help out where I could. By reading the newspapers and watching television, I was aware of what the NAACP was doing nationally. I had a hunch that the local branch was involved in some of those same activities, but I was to find out quickly that suspecting and knowing were two different things. The local organization's activities fell far short of what I had expected. I don't know whether it was by agenda or not, but its activities were teas, tag days, and dances, with a portion of the receipts being sent to the national office. I had heard of a year when the local organization raised a large sum of money and I supported the idea. But overall, I concluded that the branch was primarily a fund raising entity and I was distressed by that. If one took the time, as I did, to read the NAACP Constitution and Bylaws of those years and then note what the local branch was doing, it would have seemed as if it were a different organization. It appeared as if the local branch had chosen goals that were the easiest to accomplish. And in doing so, the black community was happy. There was the Freedom Fund Dance, the Freedom Fund Tea, and the May 17th Tag Day commemorating the May 17, 1954, Supreme Court decision outlawing segregation in public schools. Dances, tag days, and teas, were the order. But that's not all. There were also factions and bitter infighting.

At times, members openly clashed at the Executive Board level and would often continue at other membership meetings, or whenever some members saw each other again. At times everything seemed to be smooth and peaceful. Then, without warning, clashes would occur. I remember attending a branch meeting at the YMCA one Sunday when President Brown was away. "Luke" Harris, a vice-president, conducted the meeting.

The meeting was well underway when a commotion suddenly broke out. A member, for no apparent reason, began shouting at Mr. Harris. To this day I do not know what it was all about, but this individual had his say and walked out. Mr. Harris waited until the person had cleared the door before resuming the meeting. I thought everything was back in order, but as Mr. Harris began to talk, it seemed as if all hell was breaking loose outside the room. It sounded as if the member who had walked out was throwing metal garbage cans against the wall. This continued for about five minutes. Then there was silence and the meeting was allowed to continue.

I have seen Executive Board meetings and regular membership meetings adjourned because of arguments that were not just simple disagreements that could be mediated, but violent arguments. Although I never saw any of the antagonists actually come to blows, it was a miracle that it didn't happen.

I had heard and read where members of the Communist Party, and the Black Muslims had broken up NAACP meetings. I had to wonder, then as now, whether our branch

had been infiltrated. Whatever the case, the offending member or members were masters of disruptive tactics. Many times when an issue was presented, it didn't matter whether it was at a board or branch meeting, if it was distasteful to a particular member more than likely all hell would break loose. I have often thought about the ones who were so disruptive, and wondered if they were plants to keep our local programs from getting off the ground. According to one such individual, no NAACP president was worth anything, something was wrong with all of us, and nothing, absolutely nothing, we accomplished was satisfactory. Personally, I wasn't even going to try to satisfy this person.

There were others of a different nature, those who were vocal and intellectual, who felt they could vocalize and intellectualize racial problems away. They didn't know that just talking and thinking would do nothing for the average black man. All talk and no action might enhance an individual's image, and help attain personal goals, but it would do little else. I believe this was the reason why some people sarcastically called the NAACP, "The National Association for the Advancement of Certain People." We didn't need these attitudes. We needed dedicated leadership to work for those that were low on the pole as well as those in high places. We needed someone to work for the family of ten, as well as the middle class and the most fortunate class. We needed someone in the middle of the fight, and not just to delegate authority.

I viewed the foregoing problems as impediments to progress. Certainly, we had many types of personalities involved; yet, there were standards to be followed. Those standards were the programs and guidelines set at the National Conventions, which adopted the guidelines and expected the individual branches to fulfill the mandates. Although the New London branch showed tendencies toward carrying out the mandates, it appeared no efforts were made to fully accomplish activist goals. There was quite a bit of talk about what we should do. But it appeared to me that we were at the door and afraid to open it. In short, there was a lot of good talk, but it was only talk.

William Baum eventually replaced Marjorie Brown as president. I must admit that I was a bit apprehensive about Baum, even though I was one of his big boosters. Despite my feelings, I still had high hopes that just maybe my apprehensions were wrong.

No one really knows how a person will turn out. I first was under the impression that Baum would be an active president. But shortly after his election to the presidency, I changed my mind. Of course, after the election, I had to go through with my support for him anyway. Baum was active in the two Elks lodges along with being a politician. That, as far as I was concerned, boded ill for the NAACP. Political commitments and NAACP leadership, I thought, would be the source of a lot of embarrassing conflicts if Baum remained in office. And an active organization did not need these kinds of conflicts.

At the time, I thought the female leadership had been the problem as to why we were not more active. There were two female presidents prior to my joining the organization. My view was based on the fact that there were very few individuals leaning toward activism at that time. Bill Baum had been on the board of directors; in fact, he had previously been Chairman of the Board. With this in mind, I thought that he should know his way around, and I thought he was the person that should lead us. I was really looking forward to his bringing our branch into prominence. In the early 1960s, I did not mind following the leader, but I wanted to follow someone who was trying to implement our

bylaws and make positive changes, even if he or she failed while trying. That would have been fine by me. But not to try to do anything, to me, was a sin.

I wanted someone to head our organization who had in mind the people we were representing. So many times we had elected leaders who just sat, and sat, and sat. From the way many of them performed, it was doubtful they had ever completely read the branch manuals. Often it seemed we were unaware that poor, discriminated against, blacks existed. That is why I suspect that there was so much disenchantment with the local NAACP. People expected certain things from this organization, but very seldom did it live up to those expectations.

I was on the inside looking out. I could see both sides of the problem. Neither side looked very good to me. All that I could do was hope for changes sometime soon. But, stagnated as our organization was, I really sensed no change coming in the near or long term. We wanted to be friends with everyone; however, we also had another agenda to follow. No one, including national headquarters at 20th West 40th Street in New York, or anyone else, could force local branches to put their best foot forward. As with many other branches, we took advantage of that fact.

With a man leading us, I expected the local organization to take the road to activism. I envisioned the organization going out into the community and doing some of what had been set forth in our bylaws. However, it was only a vision. It never materialized because Baum resigned. He offered to me a weak excuse and left office in February, two months after being elected president. Norma Albright, vice-president, succeeded him. The resignation was terrible for some of the members. It also bothered me greatly. It was not because Albright was taking over but because Baum had withdrawn so early from the leadership. Yet, sometimes, even when things seem bleakest, brighter days are just beyond one's sight. And, as it turned out, Baum's departure was a blessing in disguise.

Around this time, there was a revival of "black-faced minstrel shows" across the state. They were also prevalent in other parts of the country. In the shows, white performers darkened their faces with coal or facial cream, then performed various acts of "buffoonery." You sometimes found blacks willing to perform in black face also. Either way, the shows devastated the image of black people in the country. The New London branch, headed by Albright, concerned itself with eliminating these shows and their dire consequences. The branch wrote to the national office to see what actions it would approve in protesting the shows. The national office responded that we had their backing and supplied a public statement and written materials.

We were to use the written materials if releasing the national's statement to organizations and the press did no good. National anticipated other situations would be forced on us by the reintroduction of minstrel shows. We began to publicize our objections. One statement of protest was that, "The NAACP objects strenuously to this type of show and it has issued a policy statement concerning the same, the original of which was instituted by the New London branch." The statement also indicated that the national organization would adopt our views and send notices to all branches. Their instructions called on branches to make strong efforts to catch "minstrels" in their planning stages so there was the possibility the organization planning such a show would modify its plans.

In November 1961 the Waterford Veterans of Foreign Wars scheduled three such shows, one at the Norwich State Hospital, and two at the Clark Lane Junior High School in Waterford. They were to be performed on three consecutive evenings. Our national organization had also suggested we resort to marches or other types of protests if it were too late and the shows were being performed anyway. When we discovered the VFW's plans, it was too late. President Albright sent a wire of protest to the commander of the post, Ray Geer. "Much damage will be done," she told him, "if your organization proceeds with the show as originally proposed." She told the commander, "It would be beneficial to all, if the organization would delete the blackface and dialect." If those deletions were not made, she said, "NAACP will object in a more vigorous manner. If a picket line is necessary, the organization will authorize it." Geer's response to Mrs. Albright's wire was, "It's still a free country and the show will go on as planned." He added to his response a statement that I deemed idiotic. He said that we should be proud the VFW was honoring blacks in that fashion. He should have known that we were not proud, if he had read the entire contents of Mrs. Albright's wire. She told him that the use of blackface and dialect was derogatory and held blacks up for ridicule. In effect, it would be a further contribution to racial misunderstanding.

She argued that to change, and make the necessary modifications, would not diminish the entertainment value of their show. Geer said he consulted with the post's attorneys who assured him they had the right to stage the productions. At the same time, he conceded the NAACP had the right to protest the production in any legal manner. Such a retort made confrontation inevitable. I could see that, but I wasn't certain the NAACP was ready. I wondered if we were going to get to the door again, as had occurred too many times in the past, and then be afraid to open it.

When I received a call from Mrs. Albright, she told me she wanted to picket the show. I then saw a glimmer of hope. Mrs. Albright told me which board members were against our demonstrating. "Don't worry," I assured her, "We're going to picket that show." I began making phone calls to the right people. When I was satisfied we had the necessary votes to over-ride any opposition, I prepared for the meeting. As expected, those in opposition spoke against demonstrating. But the issue had been settled long before the meeting took place. Getting bodies to vote for public demonstration was a big thing back then. It was a huge hurdle, and also, a historical feat.

Whether it was a face saving effort on their part I'll never know, but those speaking in opposition to the demonstration joined us on the picket line. They were out in that cold November weather parading with us. Al Garvin said of that night, "It had to be the coldest night of the year." Jimmy O'Neill, who thirty years later became New London High School's athletic director, seconded Garvin's thoughts. "I remember the incident very well," said O'Neill. "I don't know whether it was the first or second night we were out there, but whenever it was, some 'skunk' put a raccoon in our picket area. The dead animal was the talking point for a while, but as the cold weather gripped us, the dead animal was soon forgotten." By the second and last night of the demonstration, we were treated to free refreshments. Robert Hogg, a sympathizing Waterford resident, hired Norris Ferguson, owner of Minute Men Caterers, to handle our needs.

Opposition to the performances was varied. The Greater New London Ministerial League opposed the minstrel show. In addition, a number of Connecticut College faculty

members sent telegrams opposing the performances. On an extremely happy note, Clark Lane Junior High School voted never to allow "minstrels" in the school again.

As far as the demonstrations were concerned, the NAACP desperately needed the public exposure. But our demonstrations really didn't have to take place. The VFW was recalcitrant, using the excuse that they had worked so long in preparing and rehearsing that they felt they couldn't change at such a late date. If they were realistic in their disclosure, it would have been very simple to delete the black face minstrels and the dialect. In fact, we had just protested a proposed performance days before the VFW confrontation. In Stonington, the St. Mary's Fall Minstrels had been scheduled to take place just prior to the VFW's performances. I am quite sure the St. Mary's participants had rehearsed as hard as the VFW's. But St. Mary's modified their show, and the modifications had no effect on revenues.

With our first demonstration out of the way, I continued to solicit memberships. I did so despite the labor and industry committee being my first love. This committee was a challenge, and it was the ultimate position for a person who needed to expend a lot of energy. The housing committee, also a challenging one, was my close second choice behind labor and industry. I knew there were limitations to what a person could do, but there was a time when I thought of trying to head both committees. Interestingly, in my travels talking to people, the subject of housing would often surface. It was a fascinating subject discussed equally with the issue of jobs. I knew the need for decent, safe, sanitary, desegregated housing was of utmost importance. But I also knew that for people realistically to seek such housing, they needed steady employment and reasonable salaries. So I was led to concede that jobs were the most important in the scheme of things. With that idea in mind, it made reasonable sense, if we played our cards correctly, to think that we could change housing patterns drastically. I thought long and hard about what I wanted to do. Eventually, I asked Mrs. Albright if I could become labor and industry chairman. Having no objections, she appointed me to head that committee.

My first effort as chairman was to go up against a local bank. Pursuing the project, because of my work schedule, I found difficult and extremely time consuming, but we prevailed. I classified the success as a first, but I knew one success was not nearly enough. I vowed to keep up the fight for better, higher paying, and more stable employment for blacks and others. I guess I was too impatient, because I was still eyeing the housing committee. But I also knew that if the labor committee were to function properly, I could not get deeply involved in housing. The labor committee was no picnic, but neither was housing. Each would have required around the clock activity. We were only a volunteer organization and this would be too much to ask of anyone, even me. However, we did the best we could.

Albright's load as president of the local was made difficult because of concerns at home and because of her health. Her mother was ill, and she herself had a bad back. To compound these problems, she also suffered from asthma attacks. Sometime during her presidency, the bylaws for the branches were amended by the national organization. The amendment called for two-year terms in office for elected officials of local branches. When the amendment went into effect, it meant absolutely nothing to me. I was not aspiring for any office, especially the presidency. All I wanted was to do a good job with the committee I was heading; and I believed I was doing just that. As the fall of 1962

approached, I began to get feelers from people in the branch. I laughed a lot in those days because they mentioned me for president. Although I laughed about it, I also felt uncomfortable because I had no desire to be president of anything and I thought they were absurd for even considering me. During the month of September I was deluged with phone calls. My answer was always emphatic. "No!"

There came a point when I thought I had convinced them because the phone calls stopped. I figured I wouldn't be asked anymore. In October, however, when the nominating committee was selected, the calls began again. Then there were house visits, and visits to my job. The visits to the job convinced me that people were sincere in wanting me to be president. I weakened a little in my negative response. The answer was still no, but without a lot of emphasis. I could feel that I was weakening, and except for the fact that I thought Mrs. Albright hadn't been given all the support necessary, I probably would have said yes. I figured she had not been prepared for the presidency, having entered into it by default. I concluded she hadn't really had a chance to get her bearings. Even though I was wavering, I didn't want to push anyone out of office. I had no idea whether Mrs. Albright wanted two more years added to her previous time.

I had heard that Mrs. Annette Hale, the founder of the branch, was pushed out of office after only a year. Mrs. Hale was instrumental in bringing the NAACP back to New London after years of inactivity. I also had no idea whether Mrs. Albright had made plans to retain the office. But as the nominating committee went about its chores of selecting the slate of officers, the subtle feelers turned to overtures. And then they turned into near demands. I really can't explain what happened next. All I know was my part in it. I began to think more and more about President Albright's health issues. The more I thought about it, the easier it became to say yes. I wanted to call her, but I didn't. I didn't know whether it was the proper thing to do. Even when I signed the paper consenting to run, I wanted to call her. I wasn't enthusiastic about any aspects of what I was doing. In fact, I agonized over it for days on end. I guess if it were anyone else except Mrs. Albright, I probably would have been delighted. But I wasn't. The feeling I had was miserable. It was as though I were committing a sin, even though I knew I wasn't.

Eventually, I shrugged my shoulders and decided it was too late to back out. I knew that sooner or later she would hear what I had done, provided she had not been aware of the nominating committee's efforts. I then shifted the burden to Mrs. Albright. Now she had to make the choice to step down or oppose me. Thinking it should be just as easy for her to step down or to accept, I had a nervous wait. I thought about what I would do if she decided to run. Would I elect to back out, or take the chance and become her opposition? I knew if I refused the nomination, even though the committee had selected me, it would have caused me to back down totally. I still would have remained a member of the organization, but there would be no way I could have considered being active again. There were so many positive events happening nationwide. If I had chosen that way to go, it would have been a disaster for me. I wanted to be a part of those events. I was geared to activism, and I would not have liked to be held in check. Although that's the way it had been in the past, I hadn't liked it. I thought that perhaps I should sacrifice myself. It was a thought that plagued me daily.

For an active person even to consider being inactive was a painstaking ordeal. Across the country civil rights groups were on the move. The national NAACP, and the

SCLC were determined to break down the system in Albany, Georgia. James Meredith pushed for admittance to the University of Mississippi. I didn't want to be on the sidelines while historic events were taking place. The local selected the nominating committee at the October meeting and presented the new slate of officers at the November meeting. No one submitted any other names in opposition to the committee's slate. For all intents and purposes, I was now president of the local NAACP.

In December 1962, the local presented the official election results. Sit-ins had begun in the South and Midwest and civil rights actions were going on in just about every part of the country. Needless to say, I wanted a piece of the action. I wanted to become involved in those activities. I knew some members had expressed concerns about our slow approach or about having no approach at all. Still I had to wonder if I could count on them. We had talked about the dangers of doing nothing at all, but we had also discussed the possible dangers of doing something. However, although I had apprehensions, which sometimes bordered on fear, I decided to make the best of an uncomfortable situation and began speaking out immediately.

That was the easy part. How some long-time black residents responded to our statements and actions came as a surprise to me and that was hard to take. Some told me, "Take that stuff back down South. We don't need it here." Others told me, "You're only causing trouble." When we began to pressure EB to hire more blacks, a black female called and complained, "You're going to get all of those colored workers thrown out of Electric Boat." Of course, she could have been right because I had no idea what would happen, but I personally didn't think EB would do that. Yet I had no way of knowing what the shipyard's plans were, and not having that knowledge was a cause for deep thought. If I said there was no fear at all, I would be lying. But what fear I felt was for others. I guess I should have had more of it for myself, but it just seemed that I didn't. I did a lot of thinking. But my thoughts were directed toward other blacks who had given their lives in the pursuit of freedom.

This view could have been the reason I felt secure and that I really didn't think our area would respond with violence or wholesale reprisals. Even though I knew many were opposed to our very existence, and totally in opposition to what we were proposing to do, I felt reasonably safe. I believed that reprisals against blacks were minimal and thought there must be many who shared my views, although I had never really discussed with anyone my innermost feelings on the subject. This uncertainty caused me a feeling of loneliness that disappeared, however, when some of my board members came forward. I soon knew those I could depend on, and also those I couldn't depend on. I found out quickly that there was a certain amount of dishonesty existing within our organization. Finding this fact out early was a Godsend (to be dealt with later in connection with our first case).

### **Some Pleasant Surprises**

With my election came some pleasant and welcome surprises. Some of the members began to exert themselves with little or no prompting. They wrote letters to newspaper editors, local politicians, state politicians, and to any others who they thought could do us some good. And there even came the time when they walked the picket line. Those were my kind of people. They weren't particularly interested in attending meetings, even once a month. They found meetings boring, and I had no arguments with their viewpoint.



I was told that many would have preferred more activity, which they thought more productive than sitting through meetings. While I had never liked meetings either, sometimes they were a necessary evil. I cannot say the majority of our members were activists, though I wish that had been the truth. I can say, however, that the bulk of our group basically agreed with our goals and purposes, and many of the members would provide financial support. Otherwise, they remained in the background.

There were other members who didn't mind exposure, but would only go so far. My mother was in that category. She once told me, "I'll do anything to help you and the organization. But don't ever ask me to walk a picket line." I understood and truly respected her position. Those who shared her views were also my kind of people. I knew well that it would take these types of individuals to make the organization go. But there were yet other types, who, for reasons known probably only to themselves, would not join the NAACP. Strangely enough, these same individuals, without fanfare, would eagerly contribute financial support and did not want to be recognized regardless of how much they gave. I think it was a sort of self-satisfaction on their part. I would imagine they were comforted by the knowledge their funds would be used in furtherance of our goals. But, nonetheless, whether they were members or financial supporters, we needed them all.

Much to my chagrin, the racial labeling confronted by Revs. Garvin and Bell had a rebirth in the 1960s. In fact, during this period, a major complaint against many newspapers around the state finally brought the biased employment ads to a halt. When the complaint was brought to *The Day* paper about racial subtleties, I was told, "It is just a coincidence." It was difficult to believe coincidences happened so often. It seemed as if our press releases drew blood. A number of times a story we released would find, either over it, under it, or beside it, an article about an alleged, or convicted black law-breaker. True the article mentioned nothing about "Negro" or "colored," but the person's name was recognizable, and the street address was in a predominately black neighborhood.

I remember releasing a story where we were supporting civil rights activities in the South. Connecticut College students were in Mississippi registering voters, and we publicly made the fact known. Right next to our release was an article about the arrest of a Blackhall Street man for carrying a dangerous weapon. Another time we released a story to the paper, the paper carried the picture of a black law-breaker on the same page. Even when I was re-elected president of the NAACP, the paper did it to us. All of it was subtle, but effective nonetheless.

I must repeat that if I learned anything from the Garvin-Bell newspaper episode, it was that someone had to become angry. Someone had become angry with the two Reverends for trying to promote change and with Reverend Bell in particular because he would not give up. This anger resulted in positive, although temporary, actions. I knew someone would be angry with me. I was more or less expecting anger because that's the way it should have been: I was trying to do what Reverend Bell did before me. I was trying to promote changes during my NAACP involvement, and at the same time, trying to show inter-racial solidarity of purpose. I wanted to show the community that the NAACP was not an all black group as many thought. I wanted to show it was a well integrated group with the same general community purposes in mind. I believed that if we could generate enough publicity and let the community know we were here, then we could change public opinion.

I knew there were others far more educated, but I had my opinions. I figured we didn't need a person with college degrees going around trying to make friends with everyone, and in effect, trying to keep his image untarnished. Someone, in my opinion, had to get angry enough to say publicly what was wrong. And someone had to keep saying it loud enough to cause reactions among whites. I had seen the results of that action work years earlier. No one really could predict what was to come, but I knew this was the way to open people's eyes. I also knew from past efforts that whatever was tried had to be on a continuing basis. I had seen things tried in the past which lasted only a few weeks or months at the most. I saw the need to use the wisdom of those experiences for future experiments. I saw the need to involve ourselves in racial problems much more than we had been doing.

Being involved, however, was just a small part of it. Involvement also meant we had to become vocal as well as innovative. We had to shed the old ways of doing things and initiate new tactics, and expand on them. I saw a need for things to be tried and continued until a solution was reached. And whatever the solution, be it right or wrong, if problems were constantly publicized, the community would know they existed. No one likes to lose regardless of how small the incident, but if a person has done his or her best, win, lose, or draw, it was all that could be asked. Those thoughts and ideas I took with me throughout my NAACP involvement back in the 1960s. They caused many blacks to become angry with me, which was something I didn't want. And, on the other side of the issue, they also caused many whites to become angry with me. I couldn't be concerned about their anger because we were in a movement, and that's the way it was.

Not everyone became angry and many blacks, as well as a number of whites, joined with us. We vocally and physically joined hands to fight a deeply entrenched system. Let me say here and now, and it probably will be indicated a number of times throughout, it does not matter how smart a person thinks he or she is. If a person does not have a feel for the people being represented, a fraud is being perpetrated. I suspect that the only true way a person can represent another person is if the representative has experienced the other person's problem. In other words, if one can put himself or herself in another person's shoes, he or she will have a very good idea how the other person feels. Experience is the best teacher. One cannot get it from a book.

What I am writing about is the people who had the desire and the foresight to visualize the end of age-old customs. Although writing about this is comparatively easy, implementation was not. Monumental internal problems had to be controlled and getting people together to fight a system that seemed to defy solutions was difficult. There were casualties along the way but nothing to deter us from keeping pressure on the system.

New London civil rights activists were either the first, or among the first of their race in the community, to break tradition and make it easier for others. It was not the social system only that was damaging to the aspirations of people of color. But fighting the system was a double-edged sword.

Every organization or family has its ups and downs. My family had felt disruptions, but when there was turmoil, we usually were able to work things out and smooth the rough places. In our local NAACP, there always was at least one who found it difficult to conciliate differences. This was a problem over the years when meetings were disrupted

or undermined by petty shenanigans or by disgruntled people unhappy with the local NAACP leadership.

We withstood internal upheavals over the years of my administration by not focusing on inner divisions. As long as things were happening of a positive nature, I did not want to get into negative internal battles. I went through turmoil from time to time and there were a lot of uncomfortable situations. But, I will say, I think we accomplished a great deal despite the opposition of some people. In short, our organization survived because of the NAACP stalwarts on the board, though I believe our accomplishments would have been greater without internal divisions.

People told me it was wrong for activists to bail out because of criticism by a few. But I saw it differently. For example, I used to go bowling in the early 1960s. I ended my bowling activities, however, after being hit with deliberately hurtful words from another bowler. One evening I went to the bowling alley and began walking to my bowling team's seats. One of the black members, who later became a prominent politician, turned and saw me walking towards them. For all to hear, he blurted out to a teammate, "Hey, here comes Martin Luther King."

I had never thought of myself even remotely in Dr. King's category. No one else, as far as I know, commented on the sarcastic remark, but it wouldn't have made a difference anyway. I was shocked. And that evening was the last evening of bowling for me. I was in the fight for justice for our people.

As far as I was concerned, this person who insulted me was brain-washed and out of step with the times. Even though I supported him when he ran for office because he was a black man, I could easily have used the hurtful remark he made as a reason to vote against him. But I did not think like that. I felt we had to begin to make political breakthroughs and that he could be the catalyst that opened our city to other black political aspirants.

It was not just at the local level that individuals of this ilk caused a problem. It seemed they were against all black progress, or blacks who were trying to make progress. It has taken me years of trying, but I haven't figured that one out yet. When Dr. King was leading demonstrations in the 1960s, there were blacks who were critical. When King spoke out, the group had no praise for him. Dr. King's incarceration in southern jails was a means to gain public support; however, these individuals even opposed those incarcerations. In spite of all the things Dr. King did that were designed to achieve first-class citizenship for blacks, there was still a minority of blacks in total opposition. They just didn't like anything that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., did. They didn't approve of his approach to the problems of segregation and discrimination and were openly critical of his efforts.

My theory is, that they simply did not understand. I can remember prominent local blacks saying of Dr. King, at the time, "He don't know what he's doing." Or, "I wish he would stop stirring up trouble. I hope he don't come into our area with his rabble-rousing self." And still others said, "He may be the leader of those Negroes down South, but he's no leader of mine. I did not choose him, so let him stay in the South where he belongs." One person said, "He ought to stick to preaching, that's all he's good for." I had heard

and read the shocking opinions of whites about Dr. King; however, these remarks came from the mouths of blacks.

I understood this attitude better after opposition arose during the push to honor him with a holiday. I remember one prominent black female telling my mother, "Tell your son he had better be careful trying to get a holiday for King. He may find he could get embarrassed by that man." There were other blacks who wanted the holiday, but wouldn't work for it. They wanted others to do that. In 1983, a national holiday was signed into law by Ronald Reagan and it galls me to no end now, when Dr. King is no longer among us, that those previously critical are singing Dr. King's praises. They are now saying what a great man Dr. King was. I have a long memory. The caustic remarks of the past have stayed with me. Maybe some have changed their views over the years, but in my heart, I refuse to believe that. Whites were not the only ones guilty of demeaning Dr. King, but I understand white resentment better than that from blacks. Blacks had no excuse.

Some of the small things we were trying to do locally brought out some strange reactions. I had noticed these reactions well before I became NAACP president when I was trying to talk up the NAACP to local blacks, Puerto Ricans, and whites. My major focus was on pricking the conscience of blacks, and I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Some referred to me as a "Fascist" or a "Leftist." I wasn't the only one labeled, however. When other branch members, black or white, tried to rise to the occasion and promote changes, they were referred to as "Communists" or having "Communist views." Such labeling didn't trouble me as much as it should have. I think that was because at the time I had little idea of the dark connotations. What really troubled me then was who was labeling me. I expected it from whites, not blacks. I had one thing over the name-callers, however, that kept me going. I knew I wasn't a "Communist." The NAACP was the only organization to which I belonged. Also, I had two honorable discharges from the military; something I knew most of the name-callers didn't have. I don't believe the blacks who were critical of Dr. King and other progressives ever altered their opinions, although time does change things.

The group's desire for change was not diminished because we were labeled "too radical." We kept pressure on the system. That is what it really was all about. It was the constant day-to-day, and sometimes night-to-night endeavors to bring about change, no matter how small, that worked. However, I must note something of consequence about this era. We failed miserably during this time in gaining the employment of blacks in our municipal governments. For that failure, I have no one to blame but myself. We talked about the problem. We talked to the problem. We even talked around the problem. But we never really meaningfully attacked it.

Nepotism and discrimination within our local government existed throughout my presidency. We did, however, plant the seeds for a small change in that policy. I determined that New London was as staunch in its anti-minority policies as most southern cities. Gregory Massad, when he was mayor of New London, told me, "There isn't any discrimination in this city. We have a person who is black doing the hiring." Interestingly, a black male had not been hired as either a policeman or a fireman for over twelve years. I thought discrimination still existed, but I also knew how horrible it had been in the past, as was exemplified by the Eccleston incident. Blacks had stood little or

no chance of obtaining meaningful employment in New London, or for that matter, in other local governmental agencies.

At our installation of officers meeting in January 1963, I outlined our programs for the coming two years. Instead of outlining, I should have presented the programs as goals. Even though a host of members had asked me to run, I knew of only two who wanted to be as activist as I wanted to be. I wanted my freedom then and there, and I did not hold back my feelings on the subject. I held my tongue prior to becoming president because some of our board members became upset when someone suggested action. As president, however, there was a huge difference—my hands were untied. Though I couldn't anticipate what was going to happen on the state or federal level, I could anticipate what was going to happen locally.

I was quite certain that with the proper help we could make changes. I knew that there were two stalwart members who were prepared without question to do what needed to be done. As for many of the others, I wasn't sure and this was a cause of great concern for me. Some talked a believable story. They spoke credibly about what was needed here or there. But I had heard a lot of good talk before that had resulted in very little being accomplished. I adhered to the theory that talk was cheap. I wanted to replace that talk with action. In other words, I wanted to put into practice what we were preaching. I had read our guidelines for branches. I wanted to make those guidelines operate as they had never operated before. I was intensely aware of past negative comments regarding the NAACP's pronouncements as opposed to its actions.

Many times, in my solicitations for new members in the 1950s and early 60s, I was embarrassed by questions such as, "What is the NAACP doing locally?" and "This person went to the NAACP for help. He said he was told that he had no proof of his claim of discrimination." In the past whenever people complained about alleged racial discrimination, they had to supply proof. That was a convenient way out for the leadership.

Another criticism was aimed at out-of-town conventions or conferences. "Get the NAACP off the social pages" was the word. I had heard the following observation probably more than anything else. Complainers would say, "Every time I pick up the newspaper, some person is going somewhere on NAACP business. They're always going, but we don't see any local results." I would hear this criticism quite often. I don't think people were concerned about the going; they knew it was necessary in many cases; but it was the same individuals going, then returning, with no ideas to help motivate and invigorate the branch's actions that troubled people. It was common knowledge that many of the NAACP convention delegates did not give a report to the branch. That fact, coupled with the fact there was little or no local civil rights activity, resulted in a lot of resentment. Members were under the impression that their money was being used for social purposes by a certain few. Realizing how members felt about those things generally is something I always kept in my mind when I was president.

I knew that the NAACP had to begin doing more for the masses on the local level. Now, as head of a branch of the nation's most influential civil rights organization, I wanted to satisfy our disgruntled members. But that was by no means heading the list. My primary goal was that I wanted our organization to become a mainstream one. The unit needed to be far more active. That fact was inescapable. Some important national

events were dictating a trend. I watched and listened as the news media reported group after group, in cities and towns across the nation, entering the struggle.

From 1956 to 1962, the branch had elected five presidents. Though it could be that some of my predecessors were afraid of making mistakes, I felt that there were no guarantees. It would, in short, be wrong not to make attempts for fear of committing errors. Consequently, I concluded that we had to try things on a trial and error basis. I hoped that we would make no mistakes, but if mistakes occurred, I hoped it was because we were taking action, and not because we were sitting on our hands.

Years after I was out of office, one of my predecessors told me in no uncertain terms, "You made a lot of mistakes when you were in office." This pronouncement came after I had remarked, "We got involved in almost everything. But when you're trying to do things, sometimes they don't turn out the way you expect them to." I wasn't speaking in a negative sense although this person took it that way. After thinking about those days of "trial and error," I realized that rather than make mistakes, we took risks that were calculated. They were sometimes costly, but they were not mistakes. Our record, 1963 through 1968, speaks clearly to that subject.

The 1960s were turbulent years. There was more work than people to do it. While we needed a thousand people involved in our operation, the really dedicated ones could be counted on my fingers. There was a core of individuals who worked tirelessly, but in six years, we went through a lot of other people. Walter Bernard was one of those hard-core, dedicated ones. But he was a military man. A chief petty officer in the Navy, he took his chances protesting the injustices of segregation and discrimination. In spite of the possibility of disciplinary action, he was not silent. To the contrary, he was vocal in his public dissent, and his activist views eventually resulted in his being transferred from New London to San Diego. Otherwise the nucleus of our organization held together.

To keep up my morale during times of crisis, I would quote from a brochure put out by the Richmond, Virginia, NAACP branch. On the front of the brochure was written, "Footprints In The Sands Of Time Were Not Made By People Sitting Down." I would repeat that inspiring quote over and over again. Though the 1960s, for as long as I was in office, were turbulent ones, they were also motivating. A person who didn't get the fire burning inside had to have his or her head buried in the sand. That includes those in favor and those against the movement. The civil rights movement, as far as I'm concerned, began in earnest in the late 1950s. But an earlier (1953) Supreme Court decision, plus other activities, served as key elements. As the movement gathered more and more followers, there were, of course, more and more activists. As that occurred, we generally shifted to a mode of greater visibility. I don't know about others, but I could literally see and feel the change in momentum as some positive gains were taking place. In fact, others had to sense the positive momentum because the phrase, "direct action," was soon to become a legacy of the movement.

The "positives" were the 1953 Supreme Court decision banning segregated restaurants in Washington, DC, the Baton Rouge Bus Boycott in 1953, the *Brown v. Board of Education* case in 1954, and the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955, and other positives of the 1950s, which gave millions of black people hope. With those successes in the background, especially the 1953 segregated restaurant decision, the civil rights

movement eased itself into the City of Greensboro, North Carolina. It was there, in a restaurant in that city, that four black students engaged in a sit-in activity on February 1, 1960. I felt the impact of those activities because North Carolina was my home state. I was one of the many who wanted those students to succeed in their efforts. When I first heard the news, I must admit, I was dumbfounded and couldn't make any sense of it. But after a little thought, I readily saw a number of possible outcomes.

There were negatives of course, but so many of the outcomes were positive, they out-weighted the negatives. At the time, sit-ins by blacks were virtually unknown, and they grabbed attention nationally and globally. Young and old were caught up with the idea, and the sit-ins transcended all racial lines. This fact strengthened the movement. The protests called attention to the evils of discrimination and segregation. They soon moved from the lunch counters of Greensboro, to streets and lunch counters across the nation. Busses of "Freedom Riders," another avenue of focusing on the evils, soon were touring through the "Dixie" states.

### Picketing Woolworth's

Protests came to southeastern Connecticut, but not in the form of sit-ins. A local man, Enoch Marshall, and a woman, Isabell McClure, were involved. Caught up in the spirit of the times, and inspired by college student protests in North Carolina, they picketed the local Woolworth's store on State Street on the afternoon of April 28, 1960. *The Day* reported the details, including a photograph of the man wearing a protest sign. Miss McClure lived with her mother and two sisters at Mather Court in New London. They were my tenants at the time, but then I didn't know she was involved in the protest. I was busy working in the construction industry and, then, when finished with my day job, I would go on house calls as part of my radio and TV repair business. There were many evenings when I didn't even read a newspaper.

I later came to understand that the demonstration was somewhat spontaneous. They didn't have an organization backing them. In fact, they were not organized in the sense of a group such as the NAACP. Though *The Day* reported that Marshall was a NAACP and CORE member, he was never involved in the local organization that I could discover. Speaking with Miss McClure in 1997, I discovered that they went to the New London Woolworth's three days after a national NAACP official, Herbert L. Wright, visited New London. Mr. Wright was National Youth Secretary of the NAACP and, along with Reverend B. Elton Cox, Youth and College Field Director, spoke at Connecticut College on the spread of civil rights activity.

Enoch Marshall was in the audience, and was inspired by Mr. Wright's speech to take action. Miss McClure said they talked about the idea, and though Marshall expressed some reservations about losing his job, after much thought they put caution aside. They believed that they had to do something, even if they only showed themselves for ten or fifteen minutes. The pair got busy and put together a placard and printed some leaflets. Mr. Marshall wore the placard and Miss McClure handed out the fliers. They asked potential customers not to purchase anything in the store. I believe they were trying to goad local NAACP members into taking action because the New London chapter, in a close vote, had already decided not to conduct a demonstration at Woolworths.

The Marshall/McClure demonstration didn't last long, but it was, nevertheless, a precedent setting event. I don't believe either one knew they were a part of a historic event. But their actions had no equal. Mr. Marshall told the *Day* reporter that "he was an electronics mechanic" at EB. "I may not continue after this," he said. Then, after a moment of thought, Marshall declared, "But this is of little importance." I didn't know Mr. Marshall, but I was told that he didn't stay in New London long after this event. I wish I had been acquainted with him. It took a lot of guts to do what he did. He and Isabell McClure should be applauded. That event was a first in this area of Connecticut.

This initiative by Marshall and McClure raised eyebrows among area residents who knew about it. It was particularly disturbing to some New London NAACP leaders. Many of them could not understand why Woolworth's needed picketing. They said blacks had always been able to eat at Woolworth's lunch counter. The leadership had made similar assertions long before the Woolworth issue. It was their style. Being appointed to the executive board in the late 1950s, I found this positive attitude to be the order of the day. Changes were taking place in other communities, but not in ours. If our leadership did recognize any changes elsewhere, it was as if they were unaware that our policies required alterations. I think, in all honesty, that is the major reason why, on Sunday, March 6, 1960, some NAACP members had forced a debate, and a vote. They wanted to discuss the idea of picketing the Woolworth establishment.

Besides their argument that blacks had no trouble eating at the State Street facility, the leadership argued that qualified blacks were hired by the store. Their arguments would have held water if they were referring to stockroom clerks and janitors. There were few other blacks hired in any other capacity. That Sunday, in an unusually healthy situation, the debate about picketing was lively. It was one of the few discussions that I enjoyed. Usually there would be animosity involved in a debate, but not that time. And when the vote was taken, it was extremely close. In the end, the leadership won its argument. The vote was seventeen against our picketing Woolworth's, and fifteen in favor.

Instead of taking direct action, members decided to write Woolworth's national office and request that it desegregate its chain stores. That was the easy way out. It was weak because anyone could write a letter. Rather than demonstrate, the leadership was happy to hold a rally and invite local civic leaders and politicians. *The Day*, on Tuesday, March 8, 1960, editorially supported the NAACP's majority. The editorial spoke of a city where "amicable race relations have been practiced as a matter of course for many years." The only reason that race relations appeared to be "amicable" was that no one openly spoke out against the injustices, thus allowing the average citizen to think all was fine.

The Marshall/McClure episode, I think, inadvertently added to that atmosphere of false amicability because their demonstration was basically scorned. Even those who appeared to be enlightened, did not exactly greet the demonstrators with open arms. Although *The Day* did not credit President Albright with a direct quote, it did say she reiterated the NAACP stand that "It has not authorized picketing of any chain store in New London." The *Norwich Bulletin*, in an April 29, 1960, article on the picketing, used the same approach as the New London newspaper. The *Norwich* paper, referring to the pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church, Reverend A. A. Garvin, said the minister condemned the action of the man and woman this afternoon. He noted the good relations prevalent in New London. He said the Negro community, in general, is against this demonstration.



Across the nation, whether it was Woolworth's, or other public establishments, the movement called for us to take new approaches and not hide behind rallies. We needed to change from passivity to assertiveness. But meaningful change was slow in coming.

The April 29, 1960, edition of the *Norwich Bulletin* also reported on a speech NAACP National Program Director James Farmer made at the Willimantic State Teachers College (now Eastern Connecticut State University). He spoke of the first two months of sit-ins across the country and observed, "What has maintained and perpetuated segregation more than anything else, has been the tacit willingness of 'Negroes' to accept segregation. This is no longer true." Farmer said, speaking of younger blacks, "They are not willing to. They are now asserting their dignity as human beings and asserting their feelings of equality with all other persons."

I'm not making excuses for President Albright or Reverend Garvin, but I believe their views somewhat reflected the New London NAACP vote on the issue on March 6, 1960. And I also think, had I been in that position, I probably would have done the same thing. It was 1960. The New London branch was four years old, and we were just not mentally ready for such assertive action. Whether it was a mistake or not, it was part of the process from which we all learned.

In all fairness to Mrs. Albright, we did make an effort to go in the right direction. Under her, we picketed a minstrel show. But that was well over a year after Mr. Marshall picketed Woolworth's. Personally, I would rather have picketed a business with discriminatory policies. And there were so many of those flourishing at that time. But after the minstrel show demonstrations, we did very little. To me, that was pathetic. It was pathetic because of events unfolding in other parts of the country. We were being inundated by reports in the newspapers and from radio and television stations of blacks trying to break down discriminatory systems around the country. The news media, to its credit, covered the civil rights movement well. There was no mistaking what was happening around us. I thought it was the right time for the local NAACP to mount a crusade of its own.

I was well aware of the unfair practices blacks had been facing, and were still facing. Very little had changed. Even though state laws were on the books, we were not familiar with them. It seemed to me that we did not want to become familiar with them. We had lost a lot of good people who had wanted positive change. That was why when I assumed the presidency of the NAACP branch, it was almost like starting from scratch.

I wanted blacks to know there was an organization working for their rights. As far as I knew, there was only one way that could be done. We had to let them know we were in business. I intended for us to spread out and show that we were really challenging injustices. I knew there were roadblocks ahead of us, but I did not anticipate how large they were. In particular, there was one tremendous hurdle that had to be overcome. Though it was unpleasant, at least the occurrence came early in my first term. I wish it hadn't happened, but it did. But, even though it left a bitter taste, I was glad the incident happened sooner, and not later.

I first tried to follow the past practice of bringing complaints to our executive board. Though I realized what had happened to complaints in previous years, I felt that with new

leadership the results would be different. After I presented the first complaint to the board, I realized the practice would have to cease immediately. I had never liked the practice and submitting the first complaint was very revealing. I had encouraged a black female to apply for an office job when it was first advertised. She called me that evening. The lady gave me a detailed account of her interview with the owner of the establishment that advertised the job. Right at the start, she said she thought she had been a victim of discrimination. She told me it was the way the employer said things to her, though he had not mentioned anything openly concerning race.

She said he reacted as though she were the carrier of some type of contagious disease, and that if she were to be hired, he didn't want her spreading it around. I knew the lady quite well, and I knew there was no reason for her to tell me an untruth. But, truthful or not, if she filed a complaint with us, her story would still have to be checked. I knew one thing for sure, if her complaint was correct, she had truly been a victim of discriminatory practices.

I encouraged her to file a complaint with us after I had heard all of the details. But I also told her, before she filed the complaint, to be sure she felt within herself that she had been discriminated against. I told her this because I did not want her backing out of the complaint if she had the slightest doubts about it. She said she had no doubts, and would write out the complaint, with the provision that I would not do anything for two weeks. She wanted to give the employer a chance to contact her, although, after the interview, she had serious doubts. The lady's written statement detailed, among other things, that the employer "talked about getting me a desk and making room for me," and, "wanted to know what side of the room I wanted to sit on, and other things which did not make sense." The complaint also held that the employer said, "He would have to enlarge the office to accommodate me." Nothing made sense to me, except that she believed the employer was trying to discourage her. The employer never called her as he said he would. I was really hoping the lady would get the job, but if her complaint were credible, she never had a chance to begin with.

I cut the ad out of the newspaper and held it, along with the complaint, until our board met. The company the complaint was against had no blacks on its payroll. Back then, that was not unusual. On investigation, as far as we could determine, it had never hired any blacks. When I presented the complaint to the board, I was expecting an eruption as happened so many times in the past. The squabble took place as expected. It was low key, but the words involved were bitter. Ultimately, the board voted to investigate the complaint, and I selected two persons to do the investigating. My choices were Clarence Faulk and Peter J. Seng. That was when I realized we were not all united in purpose. A small minority took issue with my selection of Peter Seng, a white board member and Connecticut College faculty member. They objected to him simply because he was white. The thought that we had elected board members who were not to be treated as equals utterly shocked and dismayed me. I was under the assumption we were all equals. Not so, according to that odious minority. It seemed to me that their view was that it was all right to solicit money from people other than blacks, but after that, it was to hell with them.

If the NAACP had not been an integrated organization from its inception in 1909, my views on the subject may have been different. The organization, when formed in New

London in 1956, was multi-racial and still was. Now under my leadership someone wanted to change it. That is not the way I wanted it and that's not the way I was going to have it. If a person, regardless of race or religion, were elected by the membership or appointed to sit on the board, then that person should be allowed to participate in all phases of our activities. To do less would make the organization simply one of tokenism. It was ironic that we had to deal with this issue here in New London, when at the same time the president of the National NAACP was a white man. I said nothing while the individuals were expressing their views. I, however, stood by my decision of selecting Faulk and Seng. After I received their reports of the investigation, it was no longer a question that the practice of bringing complaints to the board was going to change.

Both Faulk and Seng briefed me about the complaint. Each told me they felt they had been betrayed. One of them told me the investigation was a washout because the company owner "was waiting for us." Their reports were almost identical. The man must have been tipped off about our investigation because he talked a better line than either Faulk or Seng. The investigation, however, wasn't actually a total washout. Though the complainant wasn't hired, the company did hire blacks shortly after that. That scenario was to happen many times as we processed complaints. It seemed a company responded to complaints by hiring other blacks, but not the complainant. If the company had been tipped off by one of our board members, and I had reason to believe it was, I was going to take steps to see to it there would be no more tips.

It was not difficult for me to decide not to bring any more complaints before the board. I didn't like the practice anyway, and after this incident it came to an abrupt halt. If others looked upon me as a renegade for changing past practices, that's how it would have to be. It wasn't a comfortable feeling to think someone in our midst would stoop so low as to warn an enemy. I was fairly new in the job but I wasn't a complete fool. I was glad the incident happened at the beginning of my term. The majority of board members went along with the changes. I knew what was at the heart and foundation of the NAACP. I also knew the programs of political action, housing, employment, freedom fund drives, youth work, and others were extremely important. But they were not the only end. There were two other items that were equally, or more, important; without them the organization might as well close up shop. Number one was the ten and fifteen dollar memberships. At that time the basic membership was two dollars. The life members were also important, but the annual dues-paying members were the solid foundation. They are the numbers in an organization such as the NAACP, and it is the numbers that count.

If the annual dues-paying members are the foundation of the NAACP, complaints are the heart. Without complaints the NAACP could well be on a par with any other social organization. The NAACP's basic function is to eliminate racism in our society. Being just another social organization may create some semblance of goodwill, but it is not what the NAACP should be about. Complaints based on racism are important for the NAACP to survive and how the organization handles such complaints determines how large a following it will have. If the NAACP does little or nothing about complaints, the organization suffers. If it handles its complaints well, and deal with the basic issues of racism, the organization flourishes.

I was so determined that the New London branch was going to take action against discrimination, I decided to inform the board after I made the change about how

complaints were handled. Although I knew there would be some grumbling, I hoped it would be only minimal. Most board members gave their approval and showed it by word and deed. As a result, as our activities increased, our membership rolls began to expand.

Alliances are always important in a movement. We benefited from a wonderful working relationship with some of New London's ministers. Rev. A.A. Garvin, pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church, was one of my main boosters. He tried to help me in every way he could. He did it openly and behind the scenes, whichever he thought would bring the best results. What mattered to me most was that he was there whenever I needed him. He was there when others needed him, also; and he had been doing this for many years before my time. During the 60s, I also worked with other ministers such as Reverends Merle Mason, Richard Campbell, Thomas C. McDougall, Robert Y. Johnson, Norman McLeod, Joseph Schneiders, and J.R. Madry, but Reverend Garvin was the key.

For many years in the community, he had already been doing what I was trying to do in the '60s. He would help people find housing and employment. On the subject of limited housing for blacks he was very outspoken. Often I wished I had his tact and diplomacy. He was really something to see when he went into action. He was vocal when he thought it would do some good; at other times, he worked without fanfare. I have spoken to so many the good Reverend helped. They had nothing except praise for him. I know he kept me busy with problems he was concerned with, and would reciprocate when I called upon him. Because of his position he couldn't help sometimes, but I knew and respected this.

The local branch became active in 1963. People around the city and state knew us. We demonstrated in Hartford, and also attended civil rights legislation hearings in that city. We also picketed Woolworth's in downtown New London, and also traveled to Washington, D.C. for the big August march. I wanted our branch to be the most active in the state. Our group offered speakers on civil rights issues, including Jacqueline Dell, Frances Myers, Clarence Faulk, Jane W. Torrey, and myself. We spoke as individuals, and sometimes as a group. We spoke in synagogues, churches, auditoriums, and in homes. We were available to anyone interested in hearing us. We fanned out during the year, spreading the message of the NAACP. We talked about our objectives and, at the same time, recruited new members. We submitted the first proposed civil rights legislation ever to be considered in New London. That was early in 1963, and by year's end we were earnestly nudging EB on hiring issues. We went into 1964, the second year of my first term, planning strategy for the year. We had suffered a major blow the previous November with the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. But even with that disaster, we kept going. We could see a ray of hope resulting from our activities. Our efforts were having an impact on the community.

To some who disagreed with our tactics, we may have been crude, unsophisticated, and barely living within NAACP policy, but we kept our objectives in view. The Annual Teas, Annual Tag Day, and Annual Freedom Fund Dances were no longer our reasons for existing. They were still a part of the program, but not as the primary activities. Persons who felt they couldn't, or wouldn't, create waves were allowed to participate in running contests, or other non-confrontational events. I could understand many of their views. I knew the possibility existed that someone who was too much an activist could end up threatened, or even fired. I had deeply considered this because the way I imagined our

role in the community, we could make some people pretty angry and that anger might cause an employer to take drastic actions such as firing NAACP activists. At the time, my belief was that anyone who didn't like what we were doing had better not get in our way. I was thinking particularly about the blacks who objected to what we were doing and the manner in which we were doing it. I began to understand that those who objected to the way we were doing things were in fact opposed to what we were doing. Those two things went hand in hand, something I didn't see at the beginning. What I did see was that if we successfully accomplished our goals, then the ends would certainly justify the means.

I applied this idea to the businesses we dealt with. We wanted to make them angry, and, furthermore, we didn't care how angry they became. We theorized that even if they had few or no blacks employed they would at least pay much more attention and as a result, they would eventually change their discriminatory practices. We wanted it known in the community that we were active in this area and that without prior notice we could possibly show up at their place of business.

I appointed Clarence Faulk as the branch's labor and industry chairman. I had been chairman of that committee prior to becoming president. At that time it seemed I couldn't get the committee going in the right direction. We had a number of activities going but it was difficult. It seemed that all of the good workers were in the wrong positions. We would come close to successfully combating employment discrimination then something would happen that prevented us from mounting the attack I had envisioned. Faulk and I could work well together. The labor and industry committee jelled after that, and we became deeply involved. Those who wanted action, or seemingly didn't mind confrontations, were given more or less a free hand. I wanted them ready for the coming battles.

Because of my commitment to seeking out better and more stable employment for blacks, we began knocking on the doors of employers. But we did not stop there. We also began knocking on the doors of employees. I could see all kinds of possibilities. But to get results would take a lot of hard work. Faulk and I planned strategies during the evenings, and tried to see if those strategies would work the following day. We were here, there, and everywhere, and if we weren't, someone else would be. The only large company we did not openly go after was Charles Pfizer. We felt we didn't have to. There was a firebrand employee working in the plant named Clyde Burrell, and Pfizer's management knew he was working there. Whatever the racial problem, we could count on him to try to address it. Because of Burrell's efforts, we had time to concentrate our attention on other businesses. We were not able to find a Burrell in any other company. If we had succeeded in finding someone, we could have done much more. Burrell was a prime example of how someone inside a company could make changes. He spoke out on whatever he felt was a racial issue on the job. And at a point when others called it quits, he put himself in harm's way. He was there physically, and his dedication to equal rights for blacks appeared in all situations. Not only was he dedicated, he was also a tireless man. He was forever prodding his employer to formulate policies of equal rights. There was hardly ever any let-up in his insistence that all employees be given equal treatment whether in hiring or promotions. Burrell was a thorn in the side when equal rights was just a fledgling topic, and talk of civil rights for blacks meant almost certain ostracism. But unpopular as the topic of civil rights was at the time, Burrell was an active proponent, and at times he had to stand alone. Ernest Kydd, Jr., was also there working behind the

scenes. But it was Burrell who was our man, making civil rights on the job an every day proposition. The Burrell and Kydd activism resulted in the company becoming more in tune with the civil rights agenda.

When requesting meetings with companies we usually determined the time of the meetings. But Charles Pfizer's went us one better. I speculate that because of the activities of Burrell and Kydd, Pfizer initiated the meetings. When we received the company's invitation, we were up to our necks with our involvement in other things. Both Faulk and I were surprised to get the invitation, but it was, to say the least, a pleasant and rewarding surprise. We had to reschedule some other appointments to attend the meeting, but we felt we had to take advantage of the situation. We were really surprised to see Burrell and Kydd sitting there, but who else should have been in attendance that evening? It surprised us because we had no prior warning they would be there. The meeting was interesting and worthwhile. And as I sat listening and talking, I remember saying to myself, "I sure hope these Pfizer officials are on the level." I thought this because the talk sounded too good to be true. After the meeting, the company officials gave Faulk and me a bottle of vitamins as a gift. As suspicious as I was, if it were before the meeting, I would have thought the vitamins a type of bribery. We had not publicized the meeting before we met, but I was on the telephone at my first opportunity, calling people who had told me they had applied at Pfizer previously. I told them that if they were still interested in a job at the plant, they should go there and reapply.

I then took the wait-and-see approach. I had asked the applicants to let me know what happened after they had applied. It was as if a miraculous transformation began to take place almost immediately. It appeared there was a genuine desire on the company's part to increase the number of blacks employed there. I can remember the names of Ensinger, McDonald and Vines as the ones we met with that evening. In the following weeks, we passed the word around about our meeting with those company officials. As a result, many blacks became employees of Charles Pfizer's. Some stayed at the company long enough for retirement parties.

In another instance, a company initiated action to resolve a case and avoid negative publicity. It occurred when we were dealing with a bank in Hartford. To get us off their backs, the bank called the State Civil Rights Commission. The commission resolved the issue in the manner that we had negotiated, but they did it privately.

In May of 1963, we decided to support southern civil rights demonstrations against the Woolworth chain by staging a demonstration at New London's Woolworth. Some of our members agreed to demonstrate. But they never showed. We had on hand Mr. Otis Brown, his granddaughter Theresa, Walter Bernard, Mrs. Anita Winston, Peter Seng, Clarence Faulk, and Jane Torrey. Those, except Theresa, were some of the board members. There were others who participated, but were not board members. In fact, the majority of the executive board had previous appointments.

I remember three black ladies walking by the store a number of times; apparently our protest confused them. They looked in the store as if they wanted to enter. They kept looking to see if the store was open. Finally, I stopped them and asked if they wanted to enter. They said they would like to go inside. I told them why we were demonstrating, but if they felt they needed to buy something from that store, we weren't trying to keep

anyone out. Smiles appeared on their faces. They entered the store and a short while later emerged with bags in their hands. They looked at me, but didn't say anything as they walked towards Bank Street. I have often wondered what they would have done if I had told them anything different. Would they have tried to enter Woolworth's had I told them not to? As we marched, someone pointed out Harold Dean, the local prosecutor. He was standing across the street watching us march back and forth.

We were very orderly and gave the local police no excuses to give us any trouble. Attorney Matthew Shafner was on hand that day. I had never met him before. He came forward with some helpful suggestions. It was the first time most of us had participated in picketing. Shafner told us not to bunch up and advised us on how many spaces we should have between us. He also advised us as to how much room we should leave for people passing. "You should not have any trouble by doing it that way," he told us. We picketed as Shafner had suggested and there were no problems. As other branch members joined us, we rotated with them. We were at the store almost the entire Saturday.

Although there were sneers and funny looks, I can remember only one person saying anything that was audible. That was a little boy, perhaps seven or eight years old. He was with an adult female I assumed to be his mother. As they passed our line, he said, "They're the ones who cause all the trouble." I thought instantly that some older person had said that in his presence, and he didn't know differently. Certainly, the people with those signs that day showed the town they were not troublemakers. I remember Mrs. Anita Winston carrying a sign that stretched across her body. The sign had pictures of blacks being mistreated in a Woolworth's store in Jackson, Mississippi. The sign read,

*THIS IS HOW WOOLWORTH'S RUNS  
ITS STORE IN JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI*

As I write, I can still see Walter Bernard, the Navy chief petty officer, marching, carrying nothing except a huge smile on his face. He was a chief shipfitter, manning a picket line that was contrary to Naval rules and regulations. There were many others who came that day to demonstrate for freedom and dignity. They held their heads high, and I was proud of each one of them. Though most of our board members ducked the activities, they must have felt a need to bring the problem to the forefront. They felt that someone should be conducting the demonstrations, even if it wasn't them.

Having little foresight, the manager of Woolworth's store was quoted in one of the daily newspapers as saying that our "picketing is senseless." How he felt was of little consequence to us. We hoped that everyone would have supported our stand. But that would have been too much to ask, because if everyone supported us, there probably wouldn't have been any reason for us to secure rights in public accommodations and other areas. The many demonstrations that occurred nationwide helped spur passage of long needed civil rights legislation on the national level.

As New London's NAACP president, I realized we could only cover so much territory, so I tried to confine our activities specifically to New London and vicinity. As a matter of conservation, being aware the Norwich area had as many problems as the New London area, I wanted the Norwich region declared off-limits. That was because we had more than our share of problems in New London. To be effective, I knew we could not

spread ourselves too thin. Although I tried hard in this endeavor to focus our efforts, as much as I tried, the attempt was not very successful for two reasons. One was our desire to ensure that all forms of racial discrimination be eliminated. The second was that we had a number of members living in the Norwich area. How could I close my eyes to problems in a region when some of our members were being affected by those problems?

There was a problem on West Main Street in Norwich at a well known restaurant. Blacks ordering food in the establishment were required to pay before being served. Whites were not. The *Norwich Bulletin* ran articles about such problems in the early 1960s. Blacks were also discriminated against at another eating and drinking establishment on West Main Street in the city. Mrs. Carlene Lee, wife of Woodrow Lee, at a New London NAACP Branch affair, reported they were discriminated against at that inn. We had heard of many incidents at this establishment, ranging from not serving blacks to breaking the glasses they drank from if they were served. The state Civil Rights Commission had cases against this place. There were also other problems at a truck rental outlet on Route 12 in Groton concerning a Norwich resident. We involved the police this time. In addition, housing discrimination in Norwich was also running rampant.

That these occurrences required us to travel far beyond the confines of the New London area created a hardship for the New London branch. We handled cases in Norwich and Colchester, and many other places. But it was difficult. Norwich had never had a NAACP branch, but Norwich had some good NAACP workers. Mrs. Mary Murphy Edwards, wife of Tealie Edwards, enlisted a great number of participants. She turned them over to me and they became New London members. I suggested, selfishly, to Mrs. Edwards that the Norwich area needed a branch to handle their own problems. She told me most people were not interested in having a branch there. But I knew it was virtually impossible for us to handle all of the problems that Norwich was experiencing. I knew something had to be done. So I talked around to people and found that a branch in Norwich was a real possibility. In fact, it was so much of a possibility that I decided to make a try. I met with several residents, including Mrs. Amanda Braboy, Reverend Joseph Schneiders, Mrs. Edwards, Reverend Richard Campbell, and Rabbi Robert Port.

With that small group, the stage was set for larger things. Less than a week later, Tuesday evening September 24, 1963, a meeting was held at the McKinley Avenue AME Zion Church. That evening, the Norwich NAACP branch was born. Reverend Joseph Schneiders, a Unitarian Universalist Minister, was elected its first president. Other officers included Reverend Richard Campbell, vice-president; Amanda Braboy, secretary; and Tealie Edwards, treasurer. I don't know how or when the rumor got started, but there was a rumor that I was going to seek the presidency of the newly-formed branch. I made it clear that I was running for nothing in Norwich. I let that fact be known with emphasis. I think someone misinterpreted my intentions when I joined the Norwich branch to become a charter member. My joining was also to help the fledgling branch build its membership roll. Other New London members who joined were Norma Albright, Jane Torrey and Robert Dantzler.

As a part of my installation speech in New London in January of 1963, I resolved to do more in education. And the members set out to try to make that speech a reality. I have only the highest praise for those NAACP members, for Connecticut College faculty, and for students at the college. Though the group often made light of it, there is little doubt



they provided much needed assistance to me. At different times there would be someone to come forward to fill in where necessary. This certainly was the case in early 1963.

Jackie Dell, branch secretary and a Groton school teacher, became interested in improving the grades of black students. Along with several others, Dell instituted a small tutorial program. By taking a small number of black high school students under their wing, they initiated efforts to upgrade the students' skills. For the small program and its successes, Dell won our praise, though not from some school officials. They frowned on the program, and their comments and attitudes were negative. Although Dell was a novice on our executive board, she had no intentions of letting criticisms halt the program. She kept the program going in spite of what others said.

At the time Dell was carrying out her program, a group of Connecticut College students were talking about involving themselves locally. The college students had originally been a part of a group called the Northern Student Movement. The Northern Student Movement had initially been formed to curtail the high ratio of black high school dropouts. The Connecticut College students voted to drop the title of Northern Student Movement, and instead call themselves, fittingly, the Civil Rights Group of Connecticut College. Some of those college students already had friends in the local high schools, but the friendships at that time were of a personal nature. They began to sit a number of evenings, and on weekends, to try improving the high school students' academic performance. They had heard what Mrs. Dell was trying to do on a small scale, and with the number of students interested, they decided to try it on a much larger scale.

Dr. Peter J. Seng, also on our executive board, and an advisor to the college's Civil Rights Group, exercised his option to expand Dell's tutorial efforts. Seng worked out a program between Connecticut College and New London High School. Because of the expansion, Seng became the intermediary between the high school and college. The differences between Dell's program and the Civil Rights Group's program were twofold. The Connecticut College group was much larger, and their program changed from all black to inter-racial. As was expected, there was some grumbling from a handful of executive board members. But the grumbling was only minor. I can remember one board member saying to me, "They stole our show and pulled it from under us."

When black students came for assistance, we enrolled them in the expanded program. Some of those students were not, by any means, poor academic students. They were above average and were attempting to reach higher levels. They were trying to become not just average or above average: They were trying for excellence. One student we enrolled in the expanded program received a B, with all the rest As. She said the B had "contaminated and disrupted" her As. She was greatly disturbed with that B. We helped obtain a tutor who gave the girl the personal attention and additional help needed. The B changed to an A. Nancy Mallon, a college student majoring in mathematics, had served as a tutor in advanced math for enrollee Jacqueline Fields. All college students who volunteered to be tutors were not accepted, even though they were volunteers. They had to be approved by the college, and the marginal ones were ruled out. Those approved were not allowed to instruct courses outside of their major. The tutors taught disciplines such as math, English, and chemistry. One student even studied astronomy. Others studied a foreign language. The tutorial classes officially ran only once a week. But unofficially, at times, they ran several days.

Being youngsters, the students and tutors became quite close. Maryann Golart, a native New Londoner attending Connecticut College, tutored Carolyn Holmes in oceanography and astronomy. Miss Holmes was the daughter of Lucille and Genious Holmes. It was said Miss Golart would take Miss Holmes to the college's lab where Miss Holmes could use the telescope and other equipment. Miss Holmes was enrolled in the high school's college preparatory program. In 1964 there were almost seventy tutors out in the field. If it had been necessary to add others, Connecticut College had them prepared. From the 1963 tutorial program, ten returned in 1964. They had participated in Mrs. Dell's program in 1963. The tutorial program became a ritual at New London's YWCA. It was headquartered there under the able assistance of Miss Marian Granfield, Executive Director of that facility. Miss Granfield showered the program with praise, and felt the similar ages between students and the tutors made for a better relationship. She was quoted as saying, "They were compatible and their ages seemed to increase their ease of communication and thereby intensified their application to their studies."

Eventually, Coast Guard Academy cadets learned of the college's tutorial program and also asked to be included. For the life of me, I can't remember if any of them were allowed to participate. I was opposed to it, and I'm guessing they were not allowed into the program. This was before either college was co-ed, and I was afraid socializing would replace tutoring. The college students had the larger program as the years passed, but it was Mrs. Dell who brought it into being. She, as a teacher, saw a need to help the younger people. Those younger people are adults now, and many of them will always remember the work and dedication of Mrs. Jacqueline Dell. Her sacrifices bolstered a sense of togetherness among young people participating in the programs.

In the summer of 1961, I was nominated as a delegate to go to Washington. Usually, I would not participate because I deemed these events strictly social affairs. This event, however, was billed as a "Freedom Train." We (Jaqueline Dell, Vernice Cook, her husband Cleophas, Jr., and myself), along with 1,250 other NAACP delegates from across New England under the banner "New England Conference of Branches," took that train. I believe the New York State NAACP branches were also on the train. There were, including those from New London, about twenty Connecticut delegates on the train. Sixteen of those delegates met with Senator Prescott Bush. The heat was stifling but we had a purpose. We were lobbying for national elected officials to support civil rights legislation.

The sit-ins that began in February of 1960 continued unabated. And new "Direct-Action" strategies were being planned. Greyhound and Trailways buses were chartered to send black and white freedom riders to southern states. I considered these riders in more danger than those persons participating in sit-ins. Not that the people at sit-ins couldn't be in danger, but the sit-ins usually took place in urban areas, whereas a mob could catch a busload of riders in a remote area where there would be few witnesses. I remember seeing pictures of those busses engulfed in black smoke, such as the one a mob had attacked on the outskirts of Anniston, Alabama. Though these busses came under the jurisdiction of the Interstate Commerce Commission there were still many problems. I believed the more attention was focused on the problems of segregation, the more chance we had of securing legislation to combat it.

Most times when we made plans for local activities, we were able to carry them out. This was the case with the March on Washington, August 28, 1963. I considered that

march a must. I am convinced that the March on Washington, in August of 1963, hastened the passage of civil rights legislation. I had heard that the national NAACP was not in favor of the march early on. If that were true, I'm glad they were made to see the light, because without their endorsement, we probably never would have gone. The march was not viewed as a social event. It was the highlight for many civil rights leaders, and it helped overcome many frustrations of the past. To me, that was the beauty of the march.

The *Hartford Courant* quoted my remarks on the benefits of the march. I told reporter Joe DeBono, "I am still amazed just how many people are not informed about the civil rights movement, or just don't give serious thought to our daily racial humiliations. And still more amazing are the New London people going to the Washington march who know all about the national civil rights injustices but who do nothing about local racial problems. I am sure the Washington march will have a local as well as a national impact. Even if all the objectives of the march are not realized, it will definitely create an atmosphere that will make people locally more aware of the racial injustices suffered by the Negro."

I was disappointed by the local turnout. There were some who indicated they would go but did not make the trip. There were rumors of trouble even before we left New London. I don't know whether those rumors deterred some, but about thirty-five New Londoners traveled to Washington to join with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in the historic march. There were 3,000 from Connecticut led by Jackie Robinson.

I urged our group to bring plenty of water, lunches, low-heeled shoes, raincoats, hats and sun glasses. I think the lunches were gone before we ever set foot in Washington. Some went by train, others by bus, and some drove their own cars. Jane Torrey, already in Washington on other business, met us at the train station that morning. As the trains emptied, it could be seen how well the event was publicized. There were many whites in the crowd. And I think the event drew more people than the organizers had anticipated.

It was difficult to get something to eat when the march was over as there were extremely long lines for food. But when the program began it seemed to ease the hunger. I searched for a shady place on the right side of the reflecting pool facing the speaker. I remember all the speakers were good. And I recall reflecting that some leaders were not in attendance that day. James Farmer, a leader of CORE, for example, was said to be in jail in Mississippi for civil rights activism.

Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered a speech that will last forever. Others who spoke that afternoon were NAACP Executive Director Roy Wilkins, John Lewis, A. Philip Randolph, and Bayard Rustin. My friend Kelly Alexander from North Carolina was also on the stand that day. He was a powerful member of the North Carolina Conference of Branches and was responsible for a large contingent from his home state. Being from the same state, we had become friends.

There is one other thing concerning that march in 1963. There were at least ten sponsoring organizations, including the American Jewish Congress. Nationally there had been good working relationships between Jewish people and people of color. It wasn't until the Supreme Court ruling on the Bakke reverse discrimination case of 1978 that I feel Jewish and black relations went spiraling downward.

Overall the March on Washington was exhilarating. For me words could not adequately describe the impression the gathering had on the local contingent. Establishing just laws has always been important in NAACP strategy, and within two years Congress passed the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Other results growing out of the march were extremely important as well: redevelopment, school segregation, housing discrimination and black separatism were to escalate into major issues that commanded our attention in the fight ahead.

# FIVE

## NAACP 1963-67: Early Cases, Redevelopment & Fair Housing

*As my first term approached its end,  
the city of New London had created two useless organizations  
to fight a well entrenched system of discrimination.*

In the 1960s, the New London NAACP was the vehicle that delivered the civil rights message throughout southeastern Connecticut. There were other small organizations, church groups, and an active civil rights group at Connecticut College, but they rarely ventured beyond the churches or college for speaking engagements. The exceptions were the students who, on occasion, spoke to our branch about their participation in the civil rights activities in Mississippi and Alabama.

The core of the NAACP was the Speakers Bureau consisting of Jacqueline Dell, Frances Myers, Clarence Faulk, Jane Torrey, and myself. Spencer Lancaster was also involved in our early group. Attorney Matt Shafner became involved and began speaking out on our behalf. Bettye Fletcher, one of the best students at New London High in the 1950s, returned to work in the community with the NAACP youth organization.

The New London branch was active enough to receive a complaint from a serviceman stationed abroad in Cuba. The complaint was quickly withdrawn, but I heard that later, in Vietnam, the New London NAACP's name was written on a barn, with my name written underneath it. I have yet to discover who was the author, or authors, of that Vietnam project. But at least three returning servicemen mentioned it to me as factual.

We traveled to other states to attend conferences and conventions. I remember Jane Torrey and I picketing a Boston Woolworth's store in a torrential downpour. At times it would be good to get away from the local scenery, but on those out of town trips, I had already stated my position. I told my board members in no uncertain terms that I wasn't satisfied going other places unless we were doing our job in our own community. I wouldn't have felt it proper, going away to listen to what other branches across the state and country were doing, unless we were trying to do some positive things in our area.

Picketing and protesting to end discrimination is the work of the NAACP; however, attendance at conventions is also important. I discovered that getting to a convention could be an ordeal in itself. I attended several national NAACP conventions, but didn't feel comfortable using what little funds the branch had. I went to Chicago to the National Convention in 1963. We really did not have the money to pay a delegate's expenses, so the branch paid for my hotel room. In order to honor the hotel reservation, I had literally to be smuggled to Chicago; as soon as I boarded the train for Chicago, I donned a waiter's uniform to keep the conductor from asking me for a ticket. At night I slept in the

quarters of the train's crewmen. Freddie Wilson, a former Navy buddy, was disappointed that I did not stay with him, but he lived too far from the convention to make staying there convenient.

Even though it was a hardship getting there, the Chicago trip was well worthwhile. I had a long talk with Herbert Hill, National NAACP's Labor Secretary. I spoke to Mr. Herbert Hill about the problem experienced by blacks at EB. The conversations helped to develop a strategy to deal with big businesses.

The Chicago convention helped us considerably because, after the convention and consultations with national leaders, we were able to push the first civil rights legislation ever to be proposed in New London. As mentioned, that was mid-1963 and by year's end, we were firmly pressuring EB. Morris Levine, a real estate broker and past president of the New London County Realtors Association, publicly admitted real estate agents discriminated. He said agents represented biased homeowners and that the agents respected the white seller's wishes. Local merchants conceded there was discrimination against blacks in local hiring practices, a fact we already knew. A couple of years before, when I was labor and industry chairman, we had conducted a wide-ranging survey. At that time, Mrs. Ruby Jo Kennedy, a sociology professor at Connecticut College, and her class helped me with the survey. We were well aware of the discriminatory practices in both housing and employment. But to see and hear the merchants and real estate men openly admitting it, was a revelation in itself.

We used any and all means at our disposal to eradicate discrimination in our area. We picketed when we thought it necessary. We called attention to practices that adversely affected blacks and other minorities. We used our publication, *The Conscience*, newspapers, radio, at times television, and speaking engagements to focus on the elimination of discrimination. We used the state statutes to help us. Those laws were on the books, but they were seldom used. We also never forgot the price of freedom. Violence was a part of the South for years. The brutality of September 15, 1963, is forever etched in my mind. Like many people around the country, we were wracked with pain after hearing about the sacrifice of Birmingham's four little girls.

### **16th Street Baptist Church Bombing Hits Home**

I don't remember what I was doing on September 15, 1963, but sometime during that Sunday afternoon, a television station reported the news about the bombing at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. Frequently, during this period, news filled the airways about black churches being bombed or burned. The incidents increased during the most active stages of the movement. Like Shiloh in New London, black churches were in the forefront as meeting sites for civil rights activities.

I guess it was part of a plan to destroy the churches, and so destroy the spirit of those who wanted freedom. But at the 16th Street church, it wasn't just a bombing. It was the killing of four small girls. We reacted hurriedly to the news by sending a telegram of sorrow to the Reverend John Cross, pastor of the church. We also sent telegrams to the Mayor of Birmingham deploring the bombing, and to President John F. Kennedy. The telegram to the president called for governmental intervention. I began receiving telephone calls from people asking what could be done. They were highly upset over the

catastrophe and felt a sense of helplessness. All I could do was tell them to write or wire the president and express their feelings. What else could I have told them? I had done what I thought the NAACP should have done. But after that, I was as helpless as those calling me. All day Monday I tried to think of something we could do locally.

Because it was a church, I thought the area churches should take the lead. I hadn't heard of anything planned, but I knew that whichever church took the lead, the NAACP would lend its support. I tried to find something out after work that Monday evening, but to no avail. I went to work Tuesday morning without hearing of any group making plans. I began to think no one was going to do anything, and maybe the branch should try something. Shortly before noon, I saw Reverend Garvin entering the door where I was working. I thought it was odd that he would choose working hours to pay me a visit. Usually, if he had something to tell me, he would call me at home. Reverend Garvin was with Isaac Douglas, whom I knew, and a man and woman I didn't know.

Reverend Garvin introduced me to Charley Mae Jones, saying, "She has a problem." Reverend Garvin was wondering if the organization could help her. It wasn't strange for him to bring someone to the house who had a problem, but this was the first time he brought someone to my job. He took a telegram from his pocket and put it in my hand. The telegram was short and indicated that someone was dead. The telegram had come from Birmingham, but its contents went completely over my head, and I was thinking of a nice way to tell the lady we couldn't help her. I believe the Reverend thought I had seen the significance of the telegram, but I really hadn't even considered the fact that it was from Birmingham. The names on the telegram had no significance to me. It really was a strange set of circumstances, and I began to wonder why the Reverend had come to see me on the job.

Finally, hearing these words, I began to understand, "Brother Bland, this lady's sister was killed in the church Sunday morning." Whether it was a difference in names I don't know, but I hadn't connected it immediately with the 16th Street bombing. I don't know who said it, but one of the other men said three other girls were killed also. I apologized to the lady because the number of children killed took so long to strike my memory. She told me she was Cynthia Wesley's sister and that Jones was her married name. Jones had only been in the city for a month, and employed for a week. I told her I would be in touch with her after work. I told my boss, Joseph Sullivan. He gave \$50. I called *The Day* paper and told them the lady's name, and the details, including that she had no money with which to go to Birmingham. When I got home from work, the phone rang constantly. My mother told me many people had called. She had not seen the evening paper but many others had. The story made the front page. Because my telephone number was listed in the newspaper, the phone had been ringing ever since the paper hit the streets. I began taking the calls of people trying to be the first to make a donation. Some were awfully disappointed when I told them Joseph Sullivan had been the first.

It was quite a hectic evening at the house. Those people who had called me on Sunday and Monday had now found a way to do something. By eight o'clock the calls had ceased. Then came the march on my house with people coming to make good their pledges. It was a satisfying feeling to realize that people were coming forward, responding to someone they had never heard of before. Jones asked only for train fare to Birmingham; however, supporters graciously gave enough money for a plane ticket. The

following evening she took a flight out of New York to Birmingham. She was in Birmingham two hours later. That Wednesday evening, while Mrs. Jones was enroute to New York, I was in Norwich attending a memorial service for the young girls.

On the following Friday, Reverend Garvin led a march sponsored by the NAACP. We marched through the streets of downtown New London to Williams Memorial Park. There were eight ministers who took part in the march. Besides Shiloh Baptist's Reverend A. A. Garvin, there were Reverends J. R. Madry of Pentecostal Temple, New London; Thomas C. McDougall of Walls Temple AME Zion Church, New London; Richard Campbell of the AME Zion Church, Norwich; Rev. Merle Mason of New London's First Baptist Church; retired former pastor of the Ledyard Congregational Church, Rev. John Mowrey; and Mrs. Norman McLeod representing New London's Second Congregational Church. When the group arrived at the park, the ministers each said a word of prayer. The march to the park and subsequent ceremony were solemn. There were many teary-eyed participants among the integrated throng. Mrs. Jones returned to New London a few days later. *The Day* paper later ran a front-page story of her plight after her sister's murder. They ran a fairly lengthy article in which Mrs. Jones spoke pointedly about employment and housing discrimination in New London and vicinity.

After the march, we again focused our attention on discrimination complaints. On paper, some of them looked easy. But trying to process even those "easy" complaints was, sometimes, a hassle. Our biggest problem was that we all had jobs to hold down. It was almost a miracle that we could work on complaints at all. At least, that's how I looked at it. And, yet, I believe we had a tremendous rate of success.

Housing and employment dominated the complaints we received. Of course, there were complaints in other areas of everyday life, but those involving shelter and livelihood were by far the most dominant. We did not consider any complaint too large or too small. We handled all of them, as long as there was the possibility of race or color being a factor. When we received a complaint, many times we were a day or two late in getting started. Sometimes that was a problem because most of our complainants wanted us to process their complaints "yesterday." But even though we had limitations on our time, as a rule, when we began moving, we stuck with it until the complaint was resolved one way or the other. If one person couldn't handle a complaint, or found it too time consuming, another would step in, although I didn't like doing things that way because too much was likely to be lost when someone else came into the picture. The exception was when we turned a complaint over to the Connecticut Civil Rights Commission, whose representatives always started from scratch, regardless of how far we had gone.

One resolution of a complaint resulted in Sarah Chaney acquiring work in a New London bank. Chaney, a black employee of New York's Chase Manhattan Bank, desired employment at the Hartford National Bank. Chaney's family lived in New London and she wanted to live here. A private employment agency sent her to the Hartford National. After her interview, which was positive, she believed she would be employed. The bank had an opening for an operator of a Burroughs machine. She was skilled at that machine because that was her job in Chase Manhattan. She returned to New York and submitted her resignation, effective at a future date, so that the New London bank had time to check her references. From time to time, during the ensuing weeks, she consulted the personnel office at Chase Manhattan to see if the New London bank had checked her references.



Each time she was told no. When the time drew near for her resignation to be effective, Ms. Chaney began to panic at the thought of being unemployed. She came to the NAACP for assistance. I visited the State Street bank to determine why the bank had taken no action on her application. I spoke with the manager about the situation and was told that she had children, and that "our experience shows that females with children are unreliable." I was definitely not pleased with the answer. I walked down the street and spoke with businessman, city councilor, and mayor, Harvey Mallove. I told him, "I've got a complaint against a bank which it appears won't hire a Negro female." He responded that he bet it was Hartford National. "They don't hire Jews either," he said. This answer made me more determined than ever to see if the NAACP could do something. I made one more visit to the personnel office in New London. Then I called the State Civil Rights Commission in Hartford. A field man from the Commission paid a visit to the central office in Hartford. As a result, the bank acquiesced to our demands. Sarah Chaney was hired in New London as a Burroughs machine operator. Later, when she eventually left the bank, she told me, "They didn't want me to leave, Linwood." Ms. Chaney took a job at EB, where she worked until she retired.

Another case, which took some time to resolve, involved a local manufacturing plant, Garfield Belt. Resolving the complaint shouldn't have taken as long as it did, but the information was slow to come to light. Long before the complaint surfaced, I had heard rumors of someone burning paper in the ladies room of that company. No one had been seen burning the paper, and I don't think there was anything I heard that could have been considered racial. I had heard of the paper burning incidents for some time but was not apprised of the fact that a black female had been terminated because of it. It appeared she was fired for no other reason than burning the paper.

About six weeks after I first heard of the rumors, the woman involved, Juanita Knight, came to us for assistance. She told me she did not know any more about the paper being burned than I did. I assured her we would look into the matter. That was the only promise I gave her. There were no promises made to get the job back for her since the lady could have been guilty for all we knew. While we were investigating her case, we found that she had obtained the services of an attorney. I asked her about the attorney and his role in the affair. She told me she had retained one, but not to get her job back. The attorney told her that, though he couldn't get her rehired, he would have to charge her a small fee because he was going to make it possible for her to collect unemployment compensation. The attorney appealed to the company. I believe the attorney and a company official were friends. In any event, he had Ms. Knight's "blue slip" changed from "terminated" to "laid off for lack of work."

This all happened before we interviewed her. We were well into the case before we found the involvement of the police and fire departments. We spent weeks negotiating with plant managers and owners. We found ourselves getting in a quandary. We had no leverage at all because we really had nothing solid to work with. We would have been contented just to get her the job back, even if she had to go back as a new hire. But then the arsonist stigma would still be hanging over her head. It was true the lady had been fired; however, assuming that everything she told us was factual, we needed more information than we had to effectively close out her case. We had found that sometimes just our presence would cause a turnabout in management's position, but it was not to be true in this case. We needed a break.

Clarence Faulk and I were entering the plant for another try at negotiations when we lucked into a bit of information. The New London Police and Fire Departments had been called into the case at an earlier date, something we had never heard before. When we pressed the issue, we were informed that the police, if they believed the woman innocent, would have said so. I looked at it just the opposite way. If Ms. Knight were guilty, or there were a strong possibility of her being guilty, she should have been arrested. Instead of going for negotiations, we abruptly turned our attention to the police, who opened their files for our examination. We could find nothing to indicate the woman had done anything illegal. As a matter of fact, Ms. Knight's name was never mentioned in the police reports. Another break came when we learned from the police department that the fire department had also investigated the paper burning incidents.

Finding nothing in the police files that would implicate the woman, or even cast suspicion on her, the picture became clearer. If the police records showed nothing, the chances were, the fire department records would show less. From the police station, we went directly to fire headquarters. Their records also showed an investigation of alleged arson at the plant. And, as I suspected, the reports named no suspects. Now our suspicions were confirmed. To all appearances, the company felt it had to fire someone just to make itself look good—a mighty poor excuse for cutting off someone's livelihood.

After reviewing the files of the two departments, we were armed with the break we so desperately needed. Now we were certain we could get the woman reinstated. But reinstatement could not be all there was to the deal. We had to be certain that when reinstatement took place, there would be no retaliatory measures taken against the employee. We wanted to be sure she wouldn't be the victim of trumped-up charges at a later date. Recognizing this potential problem, we called on the State Civil Rights Commission. In this case, we were going to use them as an insurance policy. Art Green, the Commission's field representative, was sent to us. We discussed the case with him, after which we turned our investigation report over to him. He would need a written complaint from Ms. Knight. The complaint would not be hard to get.

Green, armed with the complaint, visited the Garfield Belt Company. We later found out that while Ms. Knight was out in the streets, the fire burning incidents had continued. This fact, however, didn't come out until after the lady was so graciously reinstated. As compensation for the weeks she was idle and humiliated, she received two paychecks until she was repaid for those lost weeks. Ms. Knight said, "They paid me for every day and every hour that I spent walking the streets during working hours." The manufacturing plant of Garfield Belt is no longer in operation, but Ms. Knight was there until the end. There were times she talked about suing the company, but I felt she was lucky to get her job back and I told her to leave well enough alone. She was on the right track, but well ahead of the times. A few years later the courts made it possible for people to sue for discrimination based on race.

I was quite serious in my assessment of complaints. I insisted we handle them all "as long as there was a possibility of race or color being a factor." Two such cases come to mind. The first involves an inter-racial affair. The other involves an EB employee. Clarence Faulk and I worked on the inter-racial matter. The case, a 1967 perplexer, was as solid as a case could be. In fact, it was airtight. But in the end, when all had been said and done, we had to turn our backs on the case. It involved a Colman Street business and

an affair between a white female and a black male. We quickly determined the couple had an affair going. Their employer had demanded the affair come to a halt. When the two ignored the demand, they both were terminated. The female brought her complaint to the NAACP. She had been a full-time employee, while her lover was part time. As it turned out, the Colman Street employment was a second job for the man.

Faulk and I had to debate whether we should go any further. Having no doubts about discrimination being involved, we decided to see it through. And, besides, whatever our reservations were, the female needed a job. When we talked to the black man, he was very cooperative, although I didn't like his attitude. One of the first things he told us was, "That job means absolutely nothing to me."

He told us additionally, "I've got a full-time job over across the river. That other job was just spending money. But if you want me to sign a statement on what happened, I will do that." Faulk and I, armed with the statement, talked in private with the employer. "I will not take either one of them back," he told us, and went on to explain that he was afraid the inter-racial affair might hurt his business. "I felt I had no other choice except to let both of them go. If I had just let one of them go, that would have been discriminatory," he explained. He felt he was well within his rights. Although I knew he was dead wrong, I did not indicate it to him. I felt I had to speak to the female before going any further. That's where a problem arose. The female had moved in with a man in a town outside of New London. I guess I should have dropped it then and there. But that wouldn't have been me, if I had. The female was nervous because I came to her house. She was worried about the man she was living with. But when I told her I would go back to New London, she had a change of attitude. "Oh that's all right, come on in. Just don't mention \_\_\_\_\_'s name in front of him when he comes home," she told me. She didn't have to tell me that. I wasn't about to mention any black man's name in front of him.

I told the lady what her former employer had told us. "He's got a lot of nerve. He's married, but his girlfriend hangs around there," she related. I couldn't get back to New London fast enough so I could tell Faulk. We both had to agree that our airtight case was now mush. We checked out her allegations. It was true. "That was supposed to be a secret," the boss told us. We told him he was going to get away with the firings. He still insisted that he would lose customers because of the couple's inter-racial affair. The female insisted that we proceed with the case. There were circumstances which could not allow that to happen. We felt we would wreck two homes. The black man was also married, and his wife had become suspicious of his activities.

In the case of the EB employee, he was much disliked. He was a first-class tradesman who had worked at the shipyard for a long time. EB, using two witnesses against him, had fired him earlier in the year. All indications showed a number of employees, of all racial persuasions, intensely despised the man. I had heard about the firing from people who didn't want the NAACP to get involved. But the more I heard, the more I wanted to know about the firing. The one thing I knew, I wasn't going out of my way to contact the man. If he showed up, I would talk to him. It took him some time, but he eventually came to my house. It wasn't difficult getting him to sign a statement. I warned him against telling anyone that we had spoken because, on the surface, his case appeared weak. I had met with company officials during that time, but I never mentioned the ex-employee. I had one thing in mind: If I could get the man's job back, as disliked as

he was, I could help others with stronger cases. I called a friend in Washington, D.C., and was told to send a signed complaint to his department.

The ex-employee contacted me from time to time to see how his case was progressing. I could tell him nothing. By April 1967, the man had not worked for three months. It was a slow process, but one day a government investigator came to see me. He had an appointment with EB. I don't know how it was done, but before keeping that appointment, the representative gave me a message, "Tell that fellow to get ready to go back to work. He's going to be re-instated." I telephoned the man and gave him the message. In a few days he received a registered letter telling him to report to work. He had won his case. It was proven that false statements resulted in the firing. The company exonerated him and reinstated his seniority. The man received thousands of dollars in back pay. He was a lonely man, so disliked that most workers shunned him and wouldn't listen to his story. But he was smart enough to acquire the necessary time so he could retire.

We often contacted the Civil Rights Commission when we felt that, after a problem was solved, there might be reprisals. It was a safety feature we found useful because the Commission had the power to penalize discriminating employers, ensuring that there would not be any reprisals against complaining clients.

While we delighted in helping Chaney, Knight, and others, I had promised, on entering office, to fight to improve the life of blacks through all our endeavors. The nation was experiencing a wave of redevelopment. New London entered its phase, and I was willing to meet the challenge.

I began by attending the redevelopment meetings and staying silent. I thought I could learn more by listening than asking. I also realized the "white flight" to other areas outside the city had begun when the talk of redevelopment became strong. I was a NAACP board member, but I attended the meetings for my personal concerns. The fact was that many of my friends and I lived in the area they were talking about demolishing. I think I first became vocal as early as March of 1962 during a "get-out-the-vote" drive on a referendum the city fathers were favoring. They hoped the drive would be the vehicle used to get the public to approve the Winthrop Urban Renewal Plan.

I spoke for myself and for the black population that would be affected by the upheaval. Though I could remember the days of the see-through walls, the see-through roofs and the see-through floors, and yes, even the cold water flats, I was concerned that the proposed redevelopment was concentrated in all black areas. Despite thoughts of central heating, hot and cold running water, and other general improvements, a ghetto was a ghetto even if gold plated. I was interested in revealing the shortcomings of urban renewal in other cities that had undertaken redevelopment programs. I was personally opposed to any measures that did not ensure equality.

I was looking for some type of guarantee that inequality wouldn't happen here. At one of the meetings to get out the vote and support the referendum, Mayor Harvey Mallove tried to answer questions regarding race. He tried to assure everyone concerned, New London would do all it could to make sure the black population would not be short-changed with the coming demolition. I noted that with the possible exception of New Haven, blacks had the same problems they had before the projects were undertaken. This happened despite all of the laws

and all of the rules and regulations on the books at that time. The mayor replied that he had been studying an ordinance from some other city that barred landlords from hiking rents and also prevented the exclusion of people because of race.

Mallove spoke of tailoring an ordinance to fit the complexion of New London. Taking that cue, the New London NAACP drew up an ordinance and presented it to the city council. But while urban renewal went on, the ordinance never saw the light of day. The death knell, if not the actual nailing of the coffin, was sounded on that evening as Mallove and Willie Booth, chairman of the New London Board of Realtors, spoke. Mallove said that blacks could be assured that they would get a fair shake, if, and when, legislation was passed. But Mallove was careful to remind the audience on several occasions that legislation was only a small part of the over-all problem.

He indicated that legislation alone can't change peoples' minds about racial issues in housing and told the audience, "that is at the core of the problem." He did not add that legislation was still a step in that direction. William Booth was not as tactful in his remarks. He spoke of people having the right to move, but that right didn't mean that a person, black or white, was necessarily going to be welcomed to any specific neighborhood. That depended largely on the individuals involved.

Although I was concerned about redevelopment and its impact on those residing within the area, I was not the only person with those thoughts. Clarence Faulk began making waves about the problems of redevelopment. On a panel in 1963, with Mrs. Jacqueline Dell, Faulk was prepared. He spoke of the New London project by saying the Hartford and Bridgeport programs were disastrous. New London was in the ideal position where it could learn from those other "adventures." Faulk said of those cities, "They only transplanted a ghetto from one place to another. New London can do better," he said. "It's time for us to dismantle our ghetto, instead of trying to figure a way of perpetuating it." Faulk wanted our city to be a shining example of a city "moving forward." We all hoped and dreamed that would be the case. But we could not curb the inevitable, and things came apart. We were led down the path of despair for three long years.

It began in March 1962, and was to continue until January 1965. At that early meeting in March 1962, I voiced my opinions, hoping that New London blacks would not suffer as had some blacks in other cities that preceded New London in redevelopment. I had no idea how anyone, including me, was going to prevent it, but an effort had to be made. I was there along with Spencer Lancaster, a former black NAACP executive. Lancaster had political aspirations. He wanted to know where they planned to relocate blacks who would be uprooted from their homes. Though I knew blacks needed and deserved better housing, and I was sure redevelopment could provide it, my great concern was whether blacks would get, not only better and safe housing, but desegregated housing as well. If only those who had to move were allowed to vote, redevelopment would never have passed. But the entire city population voted, including some who were only peripherally touched by the plan, and others who wanted to bar blacks from their neighborhoods.

At that early meeting, Mallove used the word "tailored" in his speech. I didn't know it at the time, but that was the key word because "tailored" came to mean exclusion from some neighborhoods. I thought an officer of the NAACP branch should have been there, but none was. So under the circumstances, I tried to make the best of it. As I have said

before, I was personally opposed to the redevelopment programs. Since no NAACP branch officer was in attendance, I took it upon myself to inform the redevelopment meeting that the NAACP was on the fence.

I believe the NAACP branch was the only group that didn't take a stand at that meeting about redevelopment. All others were favorable to the project. If I had been president of the branch then, I don't know what I would have done. But I was on a fact-finding mission that evening and it wasn't possible for me to make a decision. I don't know whether it was a ploy used by the mayor, or if he was sincere about New London's passage of legislation to ensure fairness and assist in relocating blacks. When I eventually presented the report to the NAACP branch, the membership voted to support redevelopment. Frustrations began almost immediately. Informed sources told me that Mallove was "blowing smoke" at that meeting because there was no way the city council would pass any type of legislation that would allow blacks to acquire homes in white neighborhoods.

But rumors were rampant and in January 1963, shortly after I was installed as branch president, our attorney from previous NAACP administrations, Angelo G. Santaniello, met with city officials. He met with the city council and the city's law director, Edmund Eshenfelder. I had indicated to Santaniello that Mayor Mallove might be the one on the council to push meaningful legislation through. Talks between the attorney and the mayor led to a meeting between the councilors and the law director.

The councilors, every one of them, knew discrimination was widespread and the result was that in six months time the city did pass legislation, supposedly to deal with the problem. The NAACP branch had discussed enacting legislation with "teeth" to combat the widespread racial discrimination in the city. These particular measures, however, bordered on insults, but at least the legislation was the first of its kind in New London.

Then, in the latter months of 1962, and in the winter and spring of 1963, agents of the Redevelopment Agency talked to landlords about open housing. I felt that if the agency were really sincere in promoting the open housing concept, it would have been "pushy." I wanted them to be aggressive in the pursuit of open housing. I believe agency officials would have pushed for open housing legislation in New London since those officials, especially Relocation Officer Tom Layton, knew just what the problems were.

Sometime near the end of June 1963, Layton released to reporters a summary of his talks with local landlords. He reported that fifty percent of the landlords had told him they would not rent to "children and Negroes." The city councilors knew all of this, and more, and I'm sure if agency officials had wanted stronger measures, the councilors would have passed open housing legislation. But as will be seen, the NAACP basically had to go it alone. The legislation that the councilors passed created what was called a "Fair Housing Practices Board" consisting of five members: Ernest Dutord, President; Mrs. Rena Linder; L. Reginald Eccleston, Jr.; Reverend Simon Hage; and George Chandler. The ordinance also specified at least one black was to be a member of the board. Eccleston was the only black appointed among the first group.

The board's duties were to receive, study and evaluate complaints, then return their findings to the councilors. These duties were a built-in mechanism by the city for stalling on the real issues. The ordinance followed the letter and intent of the law, but it would take weeks

or months to arrive at a solution to any of the complaints. The powers the councilors gave to the board were no more than the NAACP already had. The only real difference between the board and the NAACP was that the board was allowed to meet at city hall.

My first annual report as president, in December 1963, made mention of the fact that the Fair Housing Practices Board was operational but said little else on that matter. It did not tell my real feelings about the housing board. Knowing the board was not suited to handle problems in a way that would result in speedy solutions, the NAACP pecked at it from time to time. We hoped the public prodding would embarrass the board's members to a point where they would ask the councilors to put some teeth in the ordinance. In this attempt, we did not succeed.

In the meantime, Matthew Shafner replaced Santaniello as our lawyer. We asked Shafner to study laws and draft legislation tailored to fit New London's needs. Shafner drew up legislation that we called an "Equal Opportunity Ordinance." In May 1964, with a lot of fanfare, we submitted the new ordinance to the city council. The only action taken by the councilors was to submit it to Edmund Eshenfelder, the city law director, for review. This action resulted in Eshenfelder reviewing the document for months on end. In fact, Eshenfelder took so long in reviewing the document, the city created yet another board.

The newly created organization was the "bi-racial commission," which had seven members. On Thursday, August 6, 1964, this new commission was organized. The body included David Small, its only black member. Small was elected the first chairman. Besides the chairman, there were six other members. Though we couldn't embarrass the Fair Housing Practices Board members, the Bi-Racial Commission, by virtue of its make-up, was an oxymoron and an embarrassment in itself. Commission members voted at their very first meeting to ask the city to increase their numbers.

They wanted five additional black appointees, who would then correct the imbalance of one black and six whites. Besides Small, other members of the original make-up of the committee were George Tyropolis, Richard L. Walker, John J. McGuirk, Rabbi Leonard Goldstein, John Kanabis, Benjamin A. Levinson, and Mayor Joseph F. Regan. Regan laid out the format and guidelines at the initial commission meeting. He told the members their job was to "study problems, and to act as a forum where people can come and discuss problems that otherwise would remain underground." The job was then to make recommendations to the city council for its consideration. As with the Fair Housing Practices Board, no real legislative powers were bestowed on the commission. I spoke to some individuals of the Fair Housing Practices Board, and the Bi-Racial Commission, as well as to both groups meeting in separate sessions. Almost to a person, their frustrations resounded loudly and clearly.

They knew the city council had placed a burden on them by denying them subpoena powers and the opportunity to review records of defendants. Both groups knew, with the handicaps they were under, the chances were slim that they would receive any complaints at all. A person complaining needed protection from reprisals. But neither the Bi-Racial Commission nor the Fair Housing Practices Board offered any legal assurances.

The NAACP spoke to candidates running for city council about the submission of the Equal Opportunity Ordinance. Dr. Elsie Tytla and Francis Londregan, two of the

candidates, expressed support for the proposed ordinance. Londregan, a Democrat, said it was "tailor-made" for the city. In our opinion it was "tailor-made" because we had written it. To my knowledge, Dr. Tytla, running as a Republican, expressed few reservations. It appeared she would vote in favor. Spencer Lancaster, a black Republican, said he would vote for the ordinance without reservation. The NAACP voted to support Lancaster as a candidate because of his commitment. We also took up the question of support for Tytla and Londregan because of their positions. After a debate, we voted to endorse them as well, though in the cases of Tytla and Londregan, NAACP members expressed doubts. Consequently, it wasn't a ringing endorsement of either. Lancaster was defeated for his efforts. Tytla and Londregan were elected.

As my first term approached its end, the city of New London had created two useless organizations to fight a well entrenched system of discrimination. No power of enforcement was contained in either of the ordinances that had created them. For the NAACP, the measures were thoroughly disheartening. To fight the system, we needed newer and more drastic measures. The city of New London wasn't ready for such measures. We strongly voiced our objections because to be effective these groups needed subpoena powers that would allow them, without obstruction, to review records. Without the powers of enforcement and subpoena, the two groups were nothing but hollow shells.

And it was one excuse after another from the law director's office. After eight months of reviewing our proposed Equal Opportunity Ordinance, Eshenfelder finally made his ruling. In a three page document, he ruled that the ordinance conflicted with state laws and cited numerous places where the ordinance was in conflict. He addressed the roles of the State Supreme Court, local Circuit Court, and State Civil Rights Commission. Those laws were dictated under legislation and in the state's General Statutes.

Eshenfelder cited the various steps under current law that dealt with employment, use of public accommodations and complaints of discrimination. He went on to say, "The General Statutes provides a comprehensive and detailed procedure for hearing and disposing of complaints of violations of Sections 31-126 and 53-35 of the General Statutes. A municipality can exercise no powers except those expressly granted to it, or by fair application conferred upon it by the State. The ordinance is not in the exercise of any power granted to the city, expressly or by implication. The ordinance sets up a separate procedure before a different commission and a different court in a field in which the General Assembly has seen fit to exercise its power by the enactment of a general law affecting the whole state. The ordinance would, in effect, provide an alternate or substitute procedure of the enforcement of the statutes."

Eshenfelder also cited potential problems dealing with the State Civil Rights Commission, if other cities and municipalities within the state enacted similar ordinances with the same procedures as the state. He wrote in his opinion that, "the State-created Civil Rights Commission would be superseded, and its functions usurped by a number of local commissions." This effectively killed our proposal though he also noted that in our proposed ordinance there was a provision that recognized state jurisdiction.

We had inserted the provision because we anticipated that our ordinance might conflict with the laws of the state. All it said was, and I'm sure there were other local laws stating the same thing, "If any section or sections conflict with state law," then the



local section or sections would be invalidated and state law would take precedent. Eshenfelder thought this was a big plus for his opinion. He held that the ordinance was attempting to “provide a complainant with a choice of remedies.” In attempting to do this, he said, “the ordinance, in my [Eshenfelder] opinion, conflicts with the statutes and is beyond the power of the city to enact.” In his opinion, he also objected to giving any board or commission that was a result of local legislation the power of subpoena and the power of administering oaths before taking testimony. It appeared, however, that his most strenuous objection was over the proposal that a commission would appoint its own legal counsel. “That was unheard of,” he was reported to have commented. With Law Director Eshenfelder pronouncing our proposed ordinance illegal, and the city council refusing to overrule his opinion, the issue became joined, and a collision between the city and the NAACP became inevitable. The first thing we did, trying to make an end-run around Eshenfelder’s ruling, was to talk to the State Senate Minority Leader, Peter P. Mariani. He agreed to submit what was called “enabling legislation” to the General Assembly.

This legislation, if enacted, would have permitted communities to create civil rights commissions with powers to act in the housing, public accommodations, and employment fields as long as their actions were consistent with state laws. A new twist was then added to the mix. Some city councilors who previously said they favored our proposed ordinance with subpoena powers, were now against the idea of subpoena. At least, that’s what one reliable source told me. The same source said the law director had reversed his course and was now in favor of the subpoena.

Dr. Jane Torrey, Attorney Matthew Shafner, and I met with the city councilors Mallove and Londregan in early April, 1965. We were attempting to get their assurance that our ordinance would be brought up for a vote. We also wanted to get the city council on record as supporting Senator Mariani’s two bills. Both Mallove and Londregan agreed to support Mariani’s bills publicly, which was a plus. On the minus side, they would not agree to bring our ordinance to the floor of the council. Eshenfelder said the two bills proposed by Senator Mariani, “would supply the missing link, or give us the authority to do what’s in the ordinance.” The only reservation Eshenfelder had to the two bills was that they lacked the power to compel witnesses to appear. Other than that, he said, he was totally in favor of the state enacting the bills.

Mallove said that the bills contained nothing “that isn’t totally healthy for the community. We certainly should support them.” At our board meeting that following Thursday, I told our members that the meeting with the councilors was half good, half bad. I was happy the councilors were apparently going to endorse the two bills in the General Assembly, but they turned thumbs down about putting our ordinance up for a vote. I told them the ordinance we had submitted was the most important issue in the city, but the councilors felt they didn’t have time to bring it up. Someone at the board meeting made a motion to march on city hall the following Monday when the city council was in session, and we voted to go ahead and do it. The branch quickly followed the lead of the board and voted that Saturday night, April 17, 1965, to go for it the following Monday evening. I released news of the march the following day.

I was immediately hit with comments from Councilor Joseph F. Regan, and, as was expected, other councilors also came forward with their criticisms. We expected this because we had criticized bitterly the city council and knew some of the councilors were

angry. Most of their anger was vented at Peter Seng and me. Seng had referred to the Fair Housing Practices Board and the bi-racial commission as groups with people that were nothing but “sops” thrown out by the council to keep the NAACP quiet. One councilor was so incensed by Seng’s remark that he termed it “a downright ridiculous statement from an unqualified source.”

But Peter Seng was a qualified source; and he was speaking, not only his personal views, but the views shared by a majority of us. Former Mayor Harvey Mallove, at that time a councilor and a member of the administration committee, was most vocal. It surprised me that he took exception to our remarks. I believe he had forgotten that he was the one who, three years before, had discussed the issue and was researching civil rights legislation. “They’ve got a lot of nerve,” he was quoted as saying. He was also referring to statements made in our monthly publication *The New London Conscience*. Mallove unwittingly proved Seng’s remarks had a high degree of credibility when he announced hypocritically, “The council has done a lot of work on civil rights legislation without any prodding from the NAACP. I don’t think the council or the director of law are entitled to that sort of comment.”

The city council had actually done very little in the field of civil rights, and what they had done was the direct result of NAACP prodding. Mallove’s memory was definitely short when it came to civil rights legislation. He didn’t say that it was Linwood Bland who pushed for action at the redevelopment meeting in 1962 or that it was the NAACP counsel who sat with the city councilors and law director early in 1963 to tailor civil rights legislation to fit New London’s needs. Prior to 1963, the New London City Council had done nothing even with our constant pushing. Peter Seng was entirely correct in saying that the Fair Housing Practices Board, and the Bi-Racial Commission were “nothing but sops thrown out by the council” for the express purpose of silencing its NAACP critics. Seng also said that the council had passed legislation that probably looked good to the councilors themselves, but had the effect of a boxer with his hands tied behind him.

The decision of not putting our proposed ordinance on the table, and instead, waiting to see what the state General Assembly would do, was too much for me to swallow. For me, waiting for the state to do the city’s job was similar to when Governor George C. Wallace of Alabama waited for the federal government to do the state’s work. I said, “Our city fathers are no different than the town fathers of Selma or Camden, Alabama. They are cut from the same cloth.” That remark made Councilor Regan’s blood boil. In a *New Haven Register* article, April 18, 1965, he attacked the NAACP and me in particular. Regan said our criticism of the council was the project of “a certain unprincipled and publicity-hungry people. The inflammatory material in the press was enough to make me sick to my stomach.” He finished his comments with, “I wonder if we can sit down with people crass enough, and with the stupidity to utter those statements.” Regardless of how our criticisms stung the councilors, and regardless of how angry they became, my point, along with Peter Seng’s, was eventually proven beyond a shadow of doubt.

When news of the upcoming march on city hall reached Mayor Thomas Griffin, the *Hartford Courant* quoted him as saying, “Any group is within its right to march and to attend a meeting of the council, so long as they are orderly.” I only became aware that he said this after the Monday night meeting was over. Meanwhile, I readied for the Monday

night confrontation by preparing a written statement to be released on the Sunday prior to the march. I said our group would turn out in numbers to conduct a lobby-in at the council chamber. I also said the lobby-in would be orderly and without incident, and that we intended to keep any hotheads from participating. I was saying, in effect, that we didn't intend to break any laws and that we were going to city hall because we wanted to see what action the city fathers would take on civil rights. I also noted, "We are convinced there is a need for human rights legislation here, and we are frustrated that the council seems to feel it has time for other issues when human rights are the most important in the community."

Many of us felt that the courts had expanded their roles in civil rights and had handed down a number of precedent-setting rulings, and that the council should follow their lead and enact our ordinance as presented. I said, "The council has never passed any human rights legislation with teeth, and for once it must stop hiding behind the skirts of Eshenfelder, the Law Director." My release also expressed that New Haven had enacted such a law and the officials of New Haven had demonstrated that their hearts were in the right place, that we had been frustrated by the council's lack of action for three long years, and that, therefore, we had no choice except to march on city hall.

On Monday, April 19, our group gathered at Shiloh Baptist Church in the evening. About seventy-five people were at the church. I went about my duties seeking out any troublemakers. I was pleased to find no known problem makers among the group. After I gave the group instructions, we promptly filed out of the church and began our march. It was such a remarkable sight. We marched down High Street to Franklin, then to Jay Street and turned left. We crossed Huntington Street, turned left, and proceeded past the New London Public Library. We came to the top of State Street singing "We Shall Overcome," the freedom song heard all along our march route and throughout the country. We crossed Huntington and turned right on to State Street where a number of other marchers, who had not gone to the church, joined us. We walked down State street on the sidewalk to our destination at city hall. A sudden, blinding brightness filled the air. It was the glare of television lights. I was stunned. We had not come to pose for the cameras. In fact, I had given no thought that television would even cover the event. We went right into the building without delay and proceeded up the stairs to the council chambers.

Other than the television cameras that were outside, there was only one other incident worth noting. Someone had installed "occupancy signs" (number of people allowed) in the hallway and also in the council chambers. I was to find out later it was Mayor Griffin. I had in mind to take the floor and give the councilors a good blasting, but the opportunity never presented itself. So many of our group had preceded me into the building that when I eventually got to the council chambers, all the seats were taken. I had to return to the hallway. Those "occupancy signs" had an immediate effect.

Occupancy in the council room was limited to eighty-one persons, while the other sign permitted only fifty-one to occupy the hallway. Consequently, many of our supporters were left outside. There was no action taken at that council meeting on our ordinance. And given the prevailing atmosphere during that period, no action was expected. Only those with blinders were unaware of the hostility existing between the two factions. New London's actions at the time, and subsequent non-actions, led us to coin the phrase, the city belongs in the "Hall of Shame." The occupancy restrictions were

tightly enforced that evening. Needless to say, I was terribly upset by the occupancy signs. But the shocker came in an article in *The Day* paper the following afternoon, April 20. The city had obtained the services of two detectives, and stationed them in the council chambers to keep an eye on us. I guess it was good none of our group was aware of this fact while we were there. That was really a cruel move. There were those who differed with me because I said the restrictions "were a racist, and an anti-NAACP type of move." My views on the subject have long since been vindicated because those restrictions were never enforced after our lobby-in. It took years of non-enforcement before someone had sense enough to remove those offensive signs.

In June, following on the heels of the march and lobby-in at city hall, Councilor Regan organized a meeting between the NAACP and the bi-racial commission to discuss complaints from the commission members that the NAACP was bypassing them by not submitting complaints. The councilor said that he had called the meeting to give the commission and NAACP a chance to get together and have "a meeting of the minds."

We had complaints that we could have submitted, but we believed that because there were no powers of enforcement it was a detriment to quick resolution. If we couldn't handle it ourselves, we passed it on to the appropriate state agencies. I realized that they were feeling neglected, but the commission couldn't guarantee action on complaints. As with the Fair Housing Practices Board, we had peppered the Bi-racial Commission with negative comments. But we were not as hard on them as we had been on the housing board because the commission recognized from its inception that it was a racially unbalanced group.

At the meeting, David Small, chairman of the Bi-Racial Commission, admitted that committee members felt it was just a paper committee. He said that a meeting between our groups was just a waste of time, and that members felt nothing could be accomplished. I thought, after hearing about his comments, that we had something going for us. Maybe the councilors would heed his statement and give the commission some sort of enforcement powers. I was shocked when they began discussing ways to make the commission more effective. I was shocked further when they mentioned the idea that the police and welfare department investigators could aid the group in its investigations.

As I listened to the discussions, I couldn't imagine the city council was suddenly becoming liberal overnight. If so, I would have been totally in favor of the move. But I felt it was just talk, and nothing else. I prodded them on the subpoena powers again, but Eshenfelder stuck by his original opinion. I suggested that the law director look at ordinances enacted in New Haven and Stamford. Attorney Melvin Scott, filling in for Branch Attorney Matthew Shafner, also told the city council and commission members that speed was an essential tool in handling civil rights complaints. He advised that the number of people handling cases and how much money was spent determined how efficiently cases were handled. Though the councilors recognized that haste was a requisite to addressing complaints, it was clear they had no intention of doing anything about implementing the changes discussed.

In 1965, as a last ditch effort to get the City of New London to pass meaningful legislation, we proposed that the city council enact a rent receivership law. Three years earlier, in 1963, the Redevelopment Agency relocation officer, Thomas Laydon, had

commented that fifty percent of the landlords he had talked to “had restrictions against renting to Negroes” and families with children. But Laydon’s words fell on deaf ears. The City of New London did not pass any legislation to make it easier to relocate black families.

The intent of the rent receivership law was to force landlords to improve conditions on their properties. The city would take receivership of rents from tenants who were living in dilapidated housing until the improvements to the properties were made. The landlord would still own the property, and when the property had been repaired with the rent money, the owner could resume collecting rents. The landlord would then receive the income back when the property was improved.

I have no idea what the reaction of the public would have been if the council had taken up our equal opportunity proposal. But I soon learned how certain people viewed this proposal. The Connecticut General Assembly had passed enabling legislation that permitted communities, such as New London, to enact laws that established Rent Receiverships. The branch went to Hartford and fought for the enactment of that legislation. It was the best chance, we figured, to get legislation, with enforcement powers, passed in New London. Support for our proposed Rent Receivership came from unexpected quarters. The International Association of Boiler Makers, Lodge 614 voiced support because some of their members resided in sub-standard housing in New London.

Lloyd Middleton, union representative of Lodge 614, ask the council to enact the receivership proposal. The NAACP submitted the proposal in the latter part of 1965 and it was still in the city’s administration committee in mid-spring 1966. The Fair Housing Committee and the bi-racial commission both came out in favor of our bill. The Redevelopment Agency followed with its support. It was good news for us that the NAACP, the Boilermakers, three city agencies, and others supported the proposed rent receivership law.

On the city council, vocal opposition came from councilors William J. Gangloff and Henry L. Bailey. I honestly do not believe Gangloff and Bailey were, by themselves, strong enough to cause its defeat. There probably were other powerful people behind the scenes who brought pressure on councilors to oppose our proposal. Gangloff, owner of the New London Mobile Home Company, called it “a dangerous law.” He blamed the tenants for causing run-down properties. But his statement was only a pistol compared to the cannon Bailey used. Bailey, president of the New London Federal Savings and Loan Association, came out strongly in opposition. He said it was only natural for people to want to eliminate blight in substandard housing. He spoke of dangers, “insidious in other ways to our community.” He said he wasn’t against anything that would “force minimum standards on rented properties.” But, he also said it would very likely deteriorate the housing market if the law were passed as submitted.

Throughout the 1960s, the city had trouble retaining managers, and this problem affected our proposed legislation. City Manager Edward Henkle retired and we had to put our Equal Opportunity Ordinance into Attorney Eshenfelder’s hands. Eshenfelder said that he had to take quite a bit of time doing the city manager’s jobs. The city eventually hired Norman H. Miller as manager, but Miller became ill in 1966 just when the rent receivership proposal was before the councilors. Eshenfelder then again became acting city manager and was in that capacity until Bernard A. Batycki assumed the role. Batycki had come into the city from Hartford. He served a short time, after which he resigned and returned

to Hartford. In August 1966, eleven months after submitting our bill to the city council, the NAACP board of directors voted to set tentative plans for a memorial of the anniversary. Our board wanted to show its dissatisfaction with the councilors, though more as a symbolic gesture than one of substance.

Clarence Faulk, Matthew Shafner, and I appeared at the next meeting of the city council. We had no real advanced warning that any action would be taken on our proposed ordinance, but when we arrived, we were told, "Something is going to happen tonight." Batycki was present and greeted us with a handshake. He had not informed us that anything was going to happen, and when we were presented with copies of his report to the council, we were genuinely surprised. The report was three or four pages in length, but it didn't take us long to realize our rent receivership proposal had met the same fate as our equal opportunity proposal. The report began with, "At this time."

The report concluded that this legislation was not needed, though he also wrote, "There is substandard housing in the city, to be sure." He said the cooperation of landlords "is generally good, and present enforcement methods are effective in accomplishing standardization with the housing code." There would have to be a large sum of money appropriated for the undertaking of such a program, and he said that money was better used to aid the staff presently enforcing the housing code. While advising that the proposed ordinance was not needed, Batycki reported that the city needed two additional inspectors to eliminate a backlog of sub-standard housing cases.

His report continued, "All the wrinkles in administering a local rent receivership program have not been ironed out." He mentioned that some court action would have to be involved, which, according to him, would cause wasted time before anything could be done. Batycki said he wasn't totally dismissing idea of the ordinance, but for the present he saw no need. "Certainly if the administration exhausted the means available to cope with recalcitrant landlords, it would not hesitate to call on the council to initiate the rent receivership ordinance." Many changes would have to be made to enact the bill, and many of these changes would cause problems. For one, the city would be thrust into the private sector of housing management. Nothing in the ordinance spelled out what the city would charge for rents, and the city "could find itself maintaining an exorbitant rent schedule." Batycki pulled out all stops as he buried our proposal. Faulk disappeared through the door on his way home before Batycki finished. I guess I should have exited also, but it was our proposal, and whether it was being enacted or killed, I felt I should take whatever was coming. Of course, I didn't like our proposal being dismissed without a formal vote, but I should have known because that was the way our previous proposed legislation died.

We had taken Mallove on a tour of sub-standard housing earlier, and what he saw, according to his own words, was "appalling." Even though Mallove was an eyewitness to the housing conditions, he made a motion that all councilors take the report home and study it. Mallove said he wanted the councilors to make a decision. After they had looked into the issue, as far as I know, that's all the councilors did. It was then that I decided the council was not going to receive any more proposed legislation from the NAACP while I was president.

While the City of New London bottled up our proposed legislation, redevelopment proceeded. The NAACP was the only active organization attempting to ferret out the

problems that redevelopment caused minorities. There were other groups active at that time, but to my knowledge, we were the only one to make an effort. Our staff was small, and redevelopment was a massive project. What work we were able to do was minimal at best. Peter Seng, editor of our newspaper, *The New London Conscience*, pointed out many problem areas through editorials. Others in our group participated in speaking forums, trying to bring out the problems of those being displaced by the urban renewal project. We did our best—but our best fell far short of our anticipated goal.

Despite my personal opposition to the urban renewal project, I knew I could never stop it. And I knew the branch couldn't stop it either. Even though branch members had reservations about the project, they had earlier voted their support. We had condemned the building of the Shaw's Cove apartment complex.

When it was chosen, I described the Shaw's Cove site as "awful," and I said that the project builders should have selected a more stable site. When Clarence Faulk and I talked to the major investor about our fears, he claimed the apartment complex would not become a slum. He said it would be thoroughly integrated, and that was his main concern. He convinced me that he was sincere in his intentions.

Although we were concerned about integrated housing, in this case, however, it wasn't our main concern. We believed the buildings would be unsafe because of the site on which they would be built, a view that the major investor obviously did not share. I told him that I could see the day when his black tenants would be forced to vacate the complex and be sent out to try to find other living quarters. But our talk with the investor failed miserably. Nothing we said made a difference. The project went on, and the apartment complex was built. It was as the investor had intended, and was operated as an integrated facility. But it was also as we had predicted. It wasn't long before major internal cracks in the structure began to appear. Then external cracks appeared. As a consequence, the New London building inspector was forced to condemn the complex. As predicted, tenants sought new living quarters. And the city demolished the entire Shaw's Cove complex.

The three proposed high-rise buildings in the Winthrop Cove area also concerned us. The Redevelopment Agency was proposing the high rise, and though we did not have any hopes of stopping the urban renewal project, in the high-rise situation, we could force some changes. And we put the wheels in motion. Here again our foresight came into play. We filed complaints about Winthrop Cove with federal housing agencies. The city set the date to begin construction on May 1, 1965. Ironically, as early as December 1963, Michael Riozzi, chairman of New London's housing authority, spoke out about the proposed site. "The housing authority never did approve of this site in that section of Winthrop Cove. We would have preferred, as everybody knows, a plot of land more firm and hence more suitable for a building. But the city did not want us to have land that could generate more tax revenues. We had a couple of other good sites in mind, but we are now playing with this land and running into obstacles." Riozzi indicated that he talked with the housing people in New York, and that's when he learned they were holding up the project for further scrutiny.

Riozzi said the housing authority had been doing everything it could to get the project underway. "But these people in New York are informed people. We are going to

have to satisfy them on every point." We knew we had held up the building process, but we had no idea where it would lead. In the end, all we had accomplished was to receive a minor decision by the New York agency, which had forced the local people to move a building a mere few feet away from Winthrop Cove. The buildings were erected. To this day, they are still standing. Possibly that move of only a few feet saved the buildings from sharing the same fate as the Shaw's Cove project.

In the mid-1990s, some officials were ready to demolish the Winthrop Cove buildings. But back then, the Winthrop Cove buildings were a certainty for housing solutions during urban renewal. We mostly kept hands off the people who were slated to go into the Winthrop housing projects. We were more concerned with people within the renewal area, who, because of income or family size, or both, had to move outside the area. We wanted them to get the best housing available for their money. Redevelopment was responsible for their being uprooted, but I felt that we had to be the watchdogs.

### **Redevelopment Agony**

A survey by Bettye Edwards Fletcher and Connecticut College students in the fall and winter of 1965 was disheartening. Her survey, conducted on behalf of the NAACP, uncovered facts that caused our executive board to seek corrective action. Our board voted to advise families living within the urban renewal area not to move. As far as we were concerned, the redevelopment people were insensitive to their problems. Families moving out of the area controlled by the Redevelopment Agency were supposed to be paid up to \$300. Yet, the NAACP survey showed relocation payments were made to only twenty-two non-white families. In addition to the payments, the agency was supposed to find housing for those people. And the housing was supposed to meet certain standards. According to the survey, and confirmed by agency officials, the agency didn't even know where the families had moved. The agency claimed they had no control over families moving out of the area. That was a fact, but if the agency had cared about the families, they would have known, and the survey showed they were not contacted by the agency.

The NAACP branch contended that the Redevelopment Agency, by referendum vote, controlled a specific area where people to be moved resided. Money and manpower was the key to communicating with them and the agency had both. Agency officials should have talked to families, individually and collectively. They didn't, though they were obligated to aid all of those families and individuals. But they let the opportunity slip away. There is no other way to describe it. They were not sensitive enough to look at the depths of the problems they had created for those who were being uprooted. The agency, regardless of its pronouncements, left the displaced families to find the housing the agency was supposed to find. In this way, the agency was absolved of any and all blame if the family found something other than safe, sanitary and decent affordable housing. Our survey showed that the majority of tenants had paid their own moving expenses. We, of course, made a lot of noise about this fact, but many of the families in question had moved outside of the city. Each family the agency was unable to find meant financial savings. I can't say the agency designed it that way, but it certainly took advantage of it. In short, the agency did not do its job and left much to be desired.

Jude Brennan, another relocation officer, pointed out what I had been saying. He said our survey covered mostly black families, and in this he was perfectly correct. But he



went on to say that the families moved without the agency's knowledge. "We couldn't control them," he said. "We've had people moving in and out without telling us where they're going." That's the very point I was making at the time. If the agency had made clear to the families what benefits were available they surely would have reported to the agency. They could have told agency officials if they were, or weren't, house hunting, or had even found a place to live. The facts were simple. The agency blew it.

Brennan said the families who didn't receive relocation payments had not applied for them. This was a weak defense. The agency did not look after the families it had under its control. Brennan insisted in March 1966 that, "We offer these payments to everyone. We've publicized this fact in the newspapers and in meetings many times. Most of those we've moved received payments." They had control over those individuals they knew about, but there was no explanation about those people they didn't know about, and who, consequently, didn't receive any payments. After the NAACP branch publicized the shortcomings of the Redevelopment Agency, a number of households subsequently received payments. An elderly white couple, living in one of the elderly housing complexes, called me one day. They wanted me to come to their home. I didn't dare ask them why they wanted me visit them. I went to their home off Colman Street and got a surprise. They had received their relocation payments because of our publicity. The couple was so happy, they had a party for me. It was one of the most joyous and fulfilling hours that I have ever spent. The couple's name along with other names were printed in our newspaper, the *Conscience*. Hopefully, all those families made their addresses available to the agency.

Nationwide, we also needed public accommodation and anti-discrimination legislation so that people of color could sit anywhere on a bus, train or plane, or, so blacks would be able to go into any public place and have a cup of coffee or get lodgings for the night, week, or whatever. We needed the Voting Rights Act so that people of color could get registered and vote on Election Day without fear of reprisals, or being disenfranchised. And we needed laws against housing discrimination so that people such as my grandmother, Rosella Gibbs, could shop around in an open market to purchase a home. We also needed additional laws that would prevent banks and other public lending institutions—known to refuse qualified blacks for mortgages—from siding with the white community in keeping neighborhoods from being desegregated. As for rental housing, it was almost always segregated—one for blacks and one for whites. And most often, housing for blacks was substandard to that offered whites. Discrimination was ever present. White members of the NAACP, who served as checkers, helped to illustrate this point.

### **Fair Housing and Checkers**

In April 1963, I spoke to a group of real estate agents at the Trade Winds restaurant on Pequot Avenue in New London. I told the agents what the NAACP's intentions were. Since part of the State Public Accommodations Statutes were administered by local police departments, we intended to see these statutes enforced. Among the services covered were houses for sale and, also, some rental units. To me, the police were the last straw. I would, of course, much rather have discrimination disappear than have to use the police. But, obviously, discrimination wasn't going away. I knew how demoralizing discrimination could be. We had been publicizing housing problems for a long time, yet the problems were still with us. My big concern with using the police as an enforcement

agency in the housing field was that I wasn't sure they could be depended on. There had been a public accommodations case in the mid-1940s, with the Skipper's Dock occurrence; twenty years later, I wasn't sure what would happen.

After my presentation to the real estate agents, I had an eerie feeling because of the types of questions they asked. I had a sense that those in the room thought they were exempt from prosecution. Angelo Santaniello, the NAACP attorney at the time, and the State's Civil Rights Supervisor, Mario Vigezzi, in my opinion, did not present the legal case forcefully enough to the realtors. I expected that they would emphatically tell the realtors they were violating the law, but instead they appeared to be sorry for them. Vigezzi ended up saying that he thought they were caught in the middle.

After my speaking appearance, a couple of the agents came close to finding the police at their door. One of them was so frightened, after he had committed the intolerable deed, that he was at my door before the aggrieved black was. He was guilty of refusing to show a house for sale. The agent said he did it on orders from the owner. He got away with it, but he also kept a very low profile after that close shave. My speech to the agents was in 1963. In 1964, over a year later, we found out how the police would handle a housing discrimination case. When it came to pass, I was stunned.

Dr. Jane Torrey was a Connecticut College professor active in the New London NAACP branch. She served as a checker and involved the police in a complaint in 1964. A checker was a white NAACP worker, or ally, who investigated discrimination complaints. I don't know where I was at the time, but I was aware we were working on a housing case, and I called and asked her to look into it. She called me back and told me the situation involved a black woman, Mrs. Vivian Pemberton, who had attempted to rent an apartment and was denied. She told me part of the story initially; then, before hanging up, she had an after-thought. "I might as well tell you," she said, "We have the police involved." I gasped when she told me that. My only word was, "Wow!" Her words momentarily shocked me. But I regained my composure in a hurry. Dr. Torrey informed me she had to go to the police station. I was more than interested and told her I would meet her there. Officer Roger Dupont was the officer she had to see. When Dupont was ready to take Dr. Torrey's statement, I accompanied her into the room. He started to type the incident report when, suddenly, he ushered me out. "You can't stay in here," he said.

I certainly wanted to hear the interrogation of Dr. Torrey. I wanted to know everything. The officer had trouble typing Dr. Torrey's statement. Maybe that was the reason he didn't want me in the room. I hoped it wasn't for any reason other than he was a poor typist. In any event, shortly after he began, Dr. Torrey asked the officer to stand so she could sit and type the statement herself. The officer complied without hesitation.

The following day, Dr. Torrey met with Circuit Court Prosecutor, Harold B. Dean. They discussed the police statement. Dean wanted to know if she would be willing to testify. She answered that she would. When Dr. Torrey told me she had seen Dean, I was still doubtful. I did not think we had a chance for an arrest. I indicated to her that I was not too hopeful. She answered, "Well, I don't know, but there was a policeman in his office to get some warrants. He took them." Then, Dean told him he "might as well take this one too," she said. That happened on September 25, 1964, four days after the rental refusal incident.

It was all watchful waiting after that. The next morning, after the warrant was served on Flora Raine and an arrest had been made, the *Norwich Bulletin* morning newspaper reported the incident. Radio stations carried their versions all day long, and *The Day*, distributed in the evening, carried its version of Flora Raine's arrest.

The trial took place in the City of Norwich, about twelve miles north of New London in early October 1964. I wanted to attend, but because of my work schedule, I couldn't go to the trial. The case was heard by Circuit Court Judge George E. Kinmouth, Jr. Other participants were Harold B. Dean, prosecutor, Flora Raine, defendant, Griswold Morgan, defense attorney, Vivian Pemberton, plaintiff, Mary Lu Robinson, witness for the prosecution, and Dr. Jane Torrey, NAACP, our checker and witness for the prosecution.

Dr. Torrey eloquently told of the case and trial in a speech before the New London Fair Housing Board six months later. Her comments clearly show the difficulties we had in combating discrimination in this case and others. She also makes known her views concerning the state's enforcement of the anti-discrimination laws:

*Fair housing laws in Connecticut and in New London are so far a pious fraud. They are shallow stage props because the enforcement behind them is slow, hesitant and biased in favor of the white bigot. A Connecticut Negro has about as much chance of getting state or city help in choosing his own house as a Mississippi Negro has of getting state aid in choosing his own school.*

*On the books our state's anti-discrimination laws look almost as good as the best in the nation, but neither the police nor the courts of law nor the Commission on Civil Rights have shown themselves willing to place the Negro's right to justice above the white's right to discriminate. I know of the sorry details only from incidents in this part of the state, but I hear from other cities so many echoes of the same story that I feel sure it is true everywhere.*

*The police, for example, are supposed to enforce the criminal provisions of the State Statutes. They seem willing to do the job except in cases where whites are charged with discrimination against Negroes.*

*My experience in such a case last fall made me realize that Connecticut is cut from the same cloth as Alabama. The police were nervous and hesitant. They waited several days before making the arrest, and it is reported that they apologized profusely to the defendant for finally having to do it. They failed to inform the witnesses of the trial until they were prodded by the prosecutor at the very last minute. In court, an all-white jury chose to take the defendant's unsupported word against contradictory testimony of at least three other witnesses. I would like to tell you what I know of the evidence in this case so that you may judge why I believe the law enforcement was less than it should be.*

One Negro woman (Mrs. Vivian Pemberton) had been to a house that was advertised for rent. Another one, Mrs. Mozella Taylor, went there to sell storm windows. A man

came to the door and told her, before she could speak, that the apartment downstairs was already rented. Another Negro, Mrs. Mary Lu Robinson went to answer an ad that ran in the paper beginning on Tuesday, September 15. She was told the place was already rented. One of those women, Mrs. Taylor, telephoned the number listed in the ad and inquired [if] they would rent to Negroes. A man told her they would not. Mrs. Pemberton went back and was told the apartment was already rented. The ad continued in the newspaper. On Tuesday, September 22, I went down, looked at the apartment and, after checking with the woman who wanted to rent it, (Mrs. Pemberton), I called the rental agent. I asked if I could put a deposit to hold it until the following day when I would make up my mind. The deposit was accepted.

At the trial, Mrs. Pemberton, our complainant, testified and was followed by Mrs. Mary Lu Robinson, another black, who had also tried to rent the apartment on September 15. "I was told the apartment was rented," she said. That was a total of at least three blacks that had sought to rent the apartment. Only our white checker was allowed to see the place. We knew nothing of Mrs. Robinson trying to rent the apartment earlier, but discovered that fact after the trial had begun. The prosecution called Dr. Torrey to the stand. She verified Mrs. Pemberton's story:

*Since a Negro woman was turned away the day before with the story it was already rented, I went with her to the police station to testify in support of her complaint that she was refused on the grounds of being a Negro. Since the lady agreed to rent to me and had said among other things, and I quote her words, 'We've had quite a few darkies come to see it but we aren't interested in them,' I thought the charge of discrimination seemed justified.*

*The next day I heard that no arrest had been made and it was reported to me that they wouldn't arrest because there had been no evidence to establish that the woman, who was in charge of renting (and who lived upstairs), was not a relative of the owner. If she had been a member of his family, the law would not have applied. It was not clear to me why the police should not have found this out for themselves, but I went anyway to say that I would not take the apartment and to ask that question. As I left the front door I saw the Negro lady who wanted to rent it come around the corner. It could not have been longer than 60 seconds later that she rang the doorbell, which was now closed and not opened to her ring.*

At this point, it should be mentioned that during the trial, when Flora Raine, the landlord, took the stand in her own defense, she denied she told Mrs. Robinson the apartment was rented. She said she was in Vermont September 15, the date Mrs. Robinson claimed she was turned down. She denied she used the word "darkies," but may have said "colored persons" were interested. She said she was in the bathtub when Mrs. Pemberton came to the door just after Dr. Torrey had cancelled the apartment. Dr. Torrey told me, "On the witness stand, she [the apartment owner] apparently succeeded in convincing the jury she had not said this, but she hardly could convince me, since I heard her say it myself." The defense attorney, Griswold Morgan, asked for a dismissal of the charges, claiming that he had received "many phone calls that were threatening in nature" because he was defend-

ing the landlord. Judge Kinmouth didn't take long to deny the motion to dismiss. In her speech before the Fair Housing Board, Dr. Torrey continued to explain the situation:

*We went again to the police station with the rest of the evidence. Even then no arrest was made until two days later and after I had been required to go to the prosecutor's office and confirm that what I had already told the police was true. Naturally I said it was.*

*As I have said, the police then failed to inform the witnesses of the trial. We found out accidentally the night before it was to take place. The police did call us but only late in the evening, after we had called the prosecutor and told him we had not heard from them.*

*At the trial the defendant was the only witness in her own behalf. She said she had been out of town when one of the Negro applicants had come to her place. The Negro lady remembered the day clearly because she had been at a choir rehearsal which takes place regularly on that day. The defendant's word was taken over the witnesses even though no one, not even the defendant's own husband, showed up at the trial to back up her statement. The defendant said she had promised the apartment to someone who left neither her name nor any deposit.*

*She claimed to have been holding it through Monday, when the other Negro lady, the one who made the complaint, had come to see it. She said she decided not to hold it any longer just when I arrived. The ad continued in the paper until the day of my visit, at least five days after the first inquiry mentioned above when another Negro lady had been told it was already rented.*

*The jury heard all this and still refused to convict the defendant of discrimination. I was accused on the witness stand of unethical methods because I had not told the defendant my purpose in trying to rent. (It could be argued, of course, that policemen should never be allowed in plain clothes or unmarked cars.)*

There were other statements and occurrences Dr. Torrey did not mention. For example, the police gave the defendant advice on the order of, "You may be able to sue Jane Torrey for entrapment." In any event, the Fair Housing Board heard more from Dr. Torrey:

*Since the jury must decide whether a person is guilty beyond the shadow of a doubt, and since none of the telephone conversations were admissible in court as evidence, their refusal to convict is not quite as strange as it sounds, nevertheless, I doubt whether clearer evidence ever could be brought in such a case. If no conviction could be made here, I doubt if any white Connecticut jury would ever convict a white person of discrimination against a Negro.*

*The circumstances that might have been considered [by] the jury, however, do not apply to the Commission on Civil Rights. They had a civil*

*complaint, not a criminal one, so they simply had to weigh the plausibility of the two sides and they could consider the telephone statement that they would refuse to rent to Negroes. In addition, the commissioners are supposed to be sophisticated people who thoroughly understand the law and are not subjected to the lawyer's histrionics in his attempt to discredit me and the other witnesses. Nevertheless, the Commission has done nothing at all about this case. They asked the owner's lawyer to talk with them. He reported incorrectly that he had received a subpoena. He did not go to Hartford. As far as I can tell, the matter has been dropped. This inexcusable delay shows me that the commissioners are also unwilling to do their job.*

*Furthermore, the criminal charge was also dropped on the grounds that there was no new evidence. What new evidence was needed is not clear to me. The prosecutor wanted me to agree to the dropping of the case, and when I refused, he accused me of trying to persecute the defendant. My opinion is that the Negro woman was the one being persecuted, but the officers of the state of Connecticut reserve their sympathy for white people. Even in Mississippi the prosecutor of Byron de la Beckwith took the case to trial twice before he not prossed it.*

*Even this sorry performance was much better than what happened about the same time last fall up in Norwich. In a case up there almost the same set of circumstances and evidence was presented to the police and the prosecutor. They refused to arrest or take any action, trying to shift the matter on the Civil Rights Commission. When the Commission informed them it was their duty, they then investigated and concluded from what the landlord said that the Negro had been refused for drunkenness and unruly children. They seem to expect the Negroes to believe their pious words and ignore their actions or rather lack of action.*

The young black man involved in the Norwich case, even though he could not rent that Arcadia Street Apartment in Norwich because of his race, subsequently gave his life for his country in Viet Nam. Dr. Torrey finished her presentation:

*My conclusion for the Fair Housing Board is to point out that the ordinance creating it gives it the task of studying housing practices and recommending further action to the council. Under this provision it might ask the council to make effective ordinances to deal with discrimination and to take action at the state level if necessary to make it possible. The board might support such legislation once it is before the council or General Assembly.*

*At one time I listed several possible reasons why few cases might have been brought to the board. At the time I could not be sure which of these were the true explanation of the Negroes' failure to take official action despite their almost universal experience that housing discrimination is the rule rather than the exception. I think I can say more*

*confidently now that the reason they don't come is because they know there is nothing the board can do. The problems continue and segregation is likely to increase with passing years till it becomes an even more serious threat than it is now.*

*One of the few powers given the Fair Housing Board was that of recommending action. It can ask the council to make it a more effective body. It can ask the state legislature to raise the budget and power of the state Commission so that it can do its job and to select commissioners who will do it.*

*Several such bills are now before the General Assembly. They deserve the support of all interested officials as well as private citizens. These bills ask for more money and more power for the Commission on Civil Rights. The equal opportunity ordinance asks the city of New London to provide help at the local level.*

*The question in my mind is whether Connecticut is in any fundamental way different from Mississippi. I have tried to express my fear that the only difference is that we keep our bigotry hidden under a cloak of pretended toleration. People in Connecticut have fits of indignation if prejudice is so much as suggested. In Mississippi the other day, the governor admitted there is discrimination. Their recognition of the true problem may help them solve it before we solve ours.*

Dr. Torrey was correct in her assessment of the Fair Housing Board by describing it as a "toothless" city creation. The best I can say for the City of New London when it came to enacting meaningful civil rights legislation is that it always looked for someone, or something else, to come to its assistance. If anything meaningful needed to be done in the field of civil or human rights, it appeared to me that the city wanted someone else to make those laws. The city council had no objections if the federal or state governments enacted strong anti-discrimination legislation. In fact, our councilors went on record at least twice on their support of national or state civil rights legislation: once, when Congress passed the Civil Rights Law of 1964 and President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the legislation, another, when they supported proposed legislation that was being debated in the Connecticut General Assembly. Those two instances showed the true mettle of our city overseers. They seemed to be saying to the minority community: Pass anything you want to on the federal or state level, but please, please don't ask us to pass anything which will help alleviate problems here in New London.

After the Flora Raine trial, anonymous phone callers harassed Dr. Torrey. Some of them told her she should be "run out of town." Others called her to say she was a "Nigger lover," or to hurl even worse things. I remember a newspaper reporter asking me where Jane Torrey lived. I told him where she lived. "Well, he can't do that very well," the reporter said. I didn't understand what he meant, so I had to ask him. He said, "This guy at the radio station is mad at Jane Torrey. He's so mad, he says he would like to buy a house next door to her, then put a Negro family with lots of kids in it." Jane Torrey, at that time, was living on college grounds. I knew that some people were angry with her as well as with me. One senses that anger after a while. Sometimes it's not what people say.

Many times when Dr. Torrey's name came up in a conversation, reactions would be negative. But there were also a lot of times the reactions would be positive.

Prejudices, at least at that time in the '60s, ran deep. I could understand it, even though I didn't like it. A person made the comment about one of our white secretaries, Betty Jane Rakosky, "I'll bet she has got a 'big black one.' " I could understand why whites could get up in arms about other whites involving themselves with us. But there were blacks that also felt the same way, and that was mind boggling to me. But I had no intentions of trying to figure that one out.

The case involving the arrest of Flora Raine was a first. The Public Accommodations Law had been amended in 1963. It was amended to include one and two family homes not occupied by the owner. Mrs. Raine was a non-owner occupant of one apartment, and rental agent for the other. The State of Connecticut had passed the initial legislation in 1949 and then had strengthened it in 1963. This was the first case under the year-old amended Connecticut State Statutes. I suspect it was also the first in the nation. The case made a decided impact across the state with a somewhat mild reaction across the country, but in New London, where it all began, things definitely changed. The following incidents will bear testimony to that fact.

Nearly a year after the arrest and "mistrial" of Flora Raine, we had to use a checker again. We had the checker establish that an apartment was not rented and there were no prospects. This is how the *Connecticut Commission on Civil Rights, Civil Rights Bulletin* for November-December, 1966, issue described the story:

*Again in November 1965, the New London NAACP chapter sought help from the New London police. In this case, a Negro, having been shown an advertised apartment by a third party, was told by the landlord that "someone else" was planning to look at it. Suspecting that the landlord was being evasive in his action, the Negro took his complaint to the NAACP which quickly learned that the apartment was still available. Accordingly, he returned to the landlord once more only to be told to come back the following day. At this point, the NAACP took the apartment hunter to police headquarters to relate his story.*

*As soon as the police had heard a full account of what had happened, Patrolman Harold Vincent was ordered to accompany the Negro apartment seeker to the apartment building to explain to the landlord the provisions of Connecticut's Public Accommodations Statute. When this was done, the landlord agreed to rent the apartment to the Negro and accepted a deposit for it. The New London NAACP chapter was so pleased with the performance of Patrolman Vincent, and the cooperation of the New London Police Department, a formal letter of commendation was sent to Police Commissioner Francis O'Grady.*

In my interview with the apartment seeker, after the incident was over, he had nothing but praise for Officer Vincent. He told me. "Vincent and the landlord sparred verbally for a few minutes. It was a stand-off until Officer Vincent explained the 'nitty gritty' of the Public Accommodations Law. The landlord backed down and agreed to take my deposit."



According to the black apartment seeker, "Officer Vincent would not take no for an answer." That was the reason for our letter of commendation for which Officer Vincent was cited.

Another one of our cases was published in the same edition of the state's *Civil Rights Bulletin*. On yet a third occasion, in the summer of 1966, the services of the police were requested by the New London NAACP. In this instance, a Negro apartment hunter had been shown an apartment and was allowed to place a partial deposit, with the understanding he would complete the deposit in a week. When he returned a week later, the landlord had apparently changed his mind about renting to him. Not wishing to pursue the matter further, the Negro asked for the return of his partial deposit. The landlord refused. When he informed the NAACP of the landlord's refusal to return his deposit, the NAACP immediately got in touch with the police department. A patrolman accompanied the Negro back to the landlord's apartment. And the deposit was promptly returned.

The New London NAACP chapter has been extremely pleased with the New London Police Department's action in these cases. As for his role, Police Commissioner O'Grady stated simply that he met with his police force shortly after the 1964 case, and explained that departmental policy would be to treat violations of the Public Accommodations Statute just as any other violation of law.

The latter case was the only one we had of its type. Generally the cases involved landlords refusing to show a home. Or as in the Flora Raine arrest case, an owner would say to a black home-seeker that the apartment was rented. We did not follow up with a survey to determine the level of racial bias in the housing market. I believe these cases actually drove those biases undercover because there was a noticeable drop in housing complaints. In addition, the State Civil Rights Commission opened an office in New London. This further reduced the complaints received by the NAACP. In 1968 the Federal Housing Act was enacted, and I don't know the impact it had on the housing market in the New London area. I do believe that singly all these occurrences had some impact and that collectively they had a major impact on discriminatory practices in housing.

Some thirty years later, people still remind me of incidents that I have forgotten. During the 1960s, so much happened. At the time, many occurrences didn't seem significant. I mean, a lot of times an episode was resolved by telephone. It was just a question of giving a person advice. Mostly, when that happened, there were no records kept. Not that the incidents were not important; it was just a matter of other things taking priority.

McKinley Winston brought one such event to my attention in June of 1996. I honestly don't remember it. But if he told me that it happened, I have no doubt it occurred. Winston reminded me of a housing problem that involved a friend of his. In the 1960s a man from Winston's home state of Alabama had recently arrived in the area. The man was employed and wanted to rent an apartment. Winston, one of my NAACP board members, called and said his friend was interested in an apartment advertised for rent though the landlord refused to allow Winston's friend to see it. It was determined that the rental was covered under the Public Accommodations Statutes.

I told them to go to the police station and report the incident. I was sure the police would take the necessary action. A little while later, Winston called and told me that the

police would not go with them to the landlord. He said that I then told them to go back to the police because this situation was covered under the law. They went back, and this time an officer went with them to the landlord. The officer explained the law to the landlord. Winston's friend was allowed to see the apartment. He liked what he saw, and the price was right, so he rented the apartment. Winston told me the man lived there peacefully for about a year before moving elsewhere.

Mrs. Lula Smalley, living in North Carolina and visiting New London in July of 1996, filled me in on another incident that occurred some thirty years earlier. The Smalleys wanted to purchase a home. They saw an advertisement that gave the address of a home for sale and also contained the price. But it wasn't easy for blacks to gain access for a showing, even though it was publicly advertised. Well, according to Mrs. Smalley, they took a ride to see if they would be interested in purchasing the home. The property was also subject to the fair housing laws. When the Smalleys drove onto the property, the people living in the house could be seen looking out of the window. Walking to the house, the Smalleys noticed the curtains being drawn. Even though the Smalleys were there for some time knocking at the door, no one answered. Mrs. Smalley told me the owners were hiding behind their curtains. They wouldn't answer the door to let the black couple see the house. Not answering the door was the exception, however. As a rule, the owners would usually come to the door with an excuse. Most of the time they would tell blacks that the place was just sold. Or they would say that someone else had seen the house and was sure to buy it.

The Smalleys came to us. If I can remember correctly, it took some doing. But we eventually arranged to let the Smalleys view the premises. They looked it over, but decided the property was not to their liking. They did get the opportunity to refuse to buy. Many blacks were not as fortunate as the Smalleys. They suffered trying to get the opportunity just to rent property. Our small band of diehard workers continued to push for change in New London, even under the threat of severe consequences.

### **Fort Hill Homes and Checkers**

In April 1965 we received a discrimination complaint against the Fort Hill Homes in Groton. The complainant, in her statement to us, said among other things, "I called Fort Hill Homes inquiring about an apartment in building number 3 and was told the apartment was rented. A friend of mine inquired and was told the same thing. My friend is Negro also. The apartment has been vacant for about five months, and I believe it will remain vacant until a white person seeks it." I contacted a white female to pose as a prospective apartment seeker. I also had her check with the complainant to be sure of the location of the apartment. The checker approached the rental agent and made overtures for the particular vacant apartment.

The checker was readily shown the apartment and was told, "If you like it, we require a \$25 deposit." The checker told the agent she would have to let her husband see the apartment and make the final decision. The checker returned to the complainant and told her what had happened. I was called and asked what should be done next. I instructed the complainant to return by herself to the rental agent. I wanted to know what answer the agent would give her. "When the complainant called me back," she said, "It's rented, and it has been for a long time." That telephone call telling me the apartment was

rented was the beginning of a case that would last for years. The initial complaint was filed, but nothing came of it. The issue would not be concluded until I had been out of office for five years.

During my last three years in office, we received additional complaints of discrimination against the complex. In 1966, we went public. But discrimination complaints were not all we received. We were to receive complaints of housing code violations, also. Those housing code violations were a new twist because they were filed by white tenants who also filed their complaints through us. Those housing code violations were the reason for the length of time it took our cases to reach a conclusion. We filed complaints with the State Civil Rights Commission, and with the State Health Commissioner. The discrimination complaints went to the Civil Rights Commission in Hartford, and the health violations went to the State Health Commissioner, also in Hartford.

Reporting to our branch membership in my 1966 Annual Report, I updated the members on the state of affairs concerning Fort Hill Homes. I told them we had filed complaints and were involved in an investigation of a situation in the Fort Hill Homes Development, in Groton. (The development, owned by a New Jersey firm, was managed by local rental agents.) The complaining tenants also claimed they were segregated by race in different parts of the project.

The tenants also accused Fort Hill Homes of giving them unequal services. Other complaining tenants also said they were living under unsanitary conditions, including rats, roaches, and mice. Although the State Civil Rights Commission and the State Health Department investigated the charges and found them valid, no positive action was reported to us by the Civil Rights Commission.

The State Health Department reported on its investigation. It stated that Groton had no housing code and, therefore, there was little chance of forcing any repairs to be made. Officials also offered to help us press the Town of Groton to enact a housing code. The Health Department also included in its report five recommendations. Our intentions, at this time, were to try to organize the tenants of Fort Hill Homes, and to use the constant threat of withholding rents if tenants' grievances were not resolved by the owners in the future.

The young ladies at Connecticut College, who belonged to the Civil Rights Club, fanned out through the Fort Hill complex. They gathered important data for use in our seeking the Town of Groton to enact a housing code. As a result of the Civil Rights Club activities in the complex, additional complaints were filed with the appropriate bodies. Even though the situation appeared to be moving rapidly, we were beset by a number of delays. The owners in New Jersey had made a proposal to the Town of Groton. They wanted the town to purchase the 186 dwelling units as a redevelopment project, a highly unlikely event. I wondered if the proposal was just a stalling tactic.

The State Health Department, in a report, had taken to task the conditions of the homes rented by tenants from the Fort Hill Homes Development. I met with Attorney Sidney Axelrod on a number of occasions. Axelrod was the attorney representing the New Jersey owners. I was trying to work out something which would benefit the tenants, and he was trying to protect the interests of his clients. My talks with Axelrod were, at the best, stalemated. Between seeking to redress our complainants' grievances, and

Axelrod trying to protect his clients, we had to find a middle ground solution. Or at least attempt to. It would have been so much easier if the Town of Groton had a housing code.

Although not intended to be that way, there was another group in the Fort Hill Homes who were tainted by our charges. That group was the homeowners in the complex. Because of the problems that had arisen, I had spoken with many of them. They had no part in the controversy, but they were stigmatized by the publicity emanating from the Fort Hill situation. Many of them favored our efforts of trying to clean up the general area. It was an eyesore to many of them, but some said the publicity had hurt the individual homeowner. Many of the homeowners opposed to the public airing of the problems agreed that something should have been done long ago. But they said that whatever should have been done, should have been done discreetly. I really felt our publicity, which indicated that it was "somewhere around a dozen" who were complaining, had little adverse effect on those homeowners. At least that was what I was led to believe.

*The Day* newspaper, picking up our beat, editorialized on the conditions at Fort Hill Homes. That's when I received a rash of phone calls from the individual homeowners. One who called had taken issue with the editorial. She told me that because our publicity was ambiguous, my "hands weren't clean either." Her name was Josephine Olsen. She sent me a copy of her rebuttal to the *Day's* editorial for my files just in case I had missed it. I apologized for our shortcomings. Mrs. Olsen said her letter was the history of the Fort Hill complex. It is interesting reading as one can readily see. Mrs. Olsen wrote:

*As a homeowner in Fort Hill Homes, I was very much disturbed by the editorial in Tuesday's Day regarding the condition of the houses at Fort Hill Homes. The enthusiasm and satisfaction of ownership has disappeared. This is untrue and unfair to the private homeowners in the development. The houses which are in dilapidated condition are not privately owned. They are the ones owned by the realty company, which purchased the surplus units from the government in 1958. Many people wanted to purchase several units at that time, but were allowed to purchase only the house occupied by themselves ... The investor who purchased these leftover units promised to put them in good condition, as we homeowners have done, but they did not keep their promise. In regard to "junk heaps which dot the landscape," the ones responsible for this condition are the people living in the house and piling junk outside. We pay \$6.25 every three months to a garbage collector to take our refuse away. I am sure the realty company could insist on their tenants doing likewise. We have gone to considerable expense to remodel our homes, and so have the other homeowners here. We reject having been told that we are still living in temporary housing.*

Mrs. Olsen's reply was an angry one. She also told me what she and most of the others had done to improve their property. She was perfectly correct. Remembering her home was proof enough. Her property along with many other privately owned homes in the Fort Hill complex were worthy of being located on any street in New London or Groton.

The problems at the Fort Hill complex, as I have said, were not to be resolved during my presidency. I was tired, true. But fatigue had nothing to do with resolving problems in

Groton. As my final term began winding down, I was hoping that Clarence Faulk would continue to monitor the Fort Hill situation should he become president. Then, he and the State Health Department could monitor the situation after I left office. Four years later, in 1972, Faulk left office. Seven years had passed since the initial complaint. Despite the passing years, however, the light was brightening and becoming brighter and brighter.

I rarely thought of Fort Hill Homes after I left office. And I probably did not think of it at all after Clarence Faulk left office. Years later, I mentioned the Fort Hill Homes issue to Faulk, who said that his administration did not get involved. In fact, he told me, he had forgotten all about the issue. If that was so, then Faulk's successor, Charles Wimberly, certainly didn't know about the Fort Hill Homes particulars. Wimberly took over the presidency in 1973. But the process had begun, and it was still in motion as NAACP administrations came and went. With strong roots, the NAACP's influence continued to flourish. A small issue of legislation in an earlier decade was permitted to grow over the years. And finally, after eight years, the child, in the form of a housing code, was born, practically to the day we received our first complaint involving Fort Hill Homes. Beginning with that initial complaint in 1965, and the filing of others in 1966, and continuing through my presidency, the NAACP did everything it could to keep pressure on the town. It's apparent that the pressure continued through three consecutive NAACP administrations. The trials and tribulations of our complainants finally culminated on May 12, 1973, when the housing code was adopted. It became effective one month later, on June 12, 1973.

Years later I reviewed the code the Town of Groton passed. I must say, from others that I reviewed, Groton's code was quite different from the average. It was probably tailored for the needs of the town. And, as I was told by one Groton resident, "It undoubtedly serves its purposes."

After discovering that the Town of Groton had enacted a housing code, I called Sidney Axelrod. He knew the situation at Fort Hill Homes as it was in the 1960s, but after a quarter century had elapsed, he did not even remember me. Stranger yet was a front page story in *The Day*, New London's newspaper. The story was not focusing on the 1960s, or '70s, or '80s. It was 1995 and was written by Matt Schurman, a *Day* reporter. The story, concerning the aforementioned Fort Hill Homes, was titled, "In Groton, 'The Project' looks to a better future." After thirty years it seemed to be "de ja vu" all over. The difference, according to the news article, was that the homeowners had been the recipients of federal funds. But the article mentioned abandoned automobiles sitting on lawns. Thirty years ago, the paper also mentioned automobile abandonment as an issue.

# SIX

## The Price of Activism

*I don't think they had a dislike for me personally,  
but I was a black symbol, a symbol that represented  
a threat to the community as they knew it.*

In housing or employment, or any other apparent violation of civil rights, we concerned ourselves with fairness: Fairness for our client and for the opposition as well. That is the way I operated, and that's the way I wanted our group to operate. I figured we would get more respect by operating in a fair and legal manner.

And, as can be seen by some of the cases we were involved in, when it came to the fight for justice, there were wins and losses. But all of these fights were done fairly and legally. Clarence Faulk and I worked on a case in which a woman complained about discrimination in hiring at a Groton supermarket. And although she was proven to be correct, she was never hired. A young white male had been hired after the woman applied. The female applicant wanted the youngster dismissed. The store manager was willing to follow her recommendation, but because of the fairness issue, we refused to accept that compromise. At another time, we received a complaint from a female hospital employee. She had been unjustly terminated, according to her account. Whatever her case was, it appeared valid on the surface. The complainant, however, held something back, neglecting to tell the full story. We discovered the incident involved name-calling, to which our complainant reacted with fisticuffs and other acts of violence. I didn't think we could represent her very well after she made some rather telling admissions. Faulk and I also worked on that case.

In 1964, I was presented with a complaint against Fitch High School in Groton. The complaint was from a parent of a student who had been suspended. The parent claimed the child had been suspended because of race. During my tenure as NAACP president, many such claims came to our attention. We looked into the allegations and usually came up with a solution agreeable to most, if not all, parties concerned. The Fitch episode turned out differently. There was a procedure, or practice, which came into play with which I was unfamiliar. Two of our board members investigated the situation and apparently came up with a reasonable solution. When the solution was presented to us, I was told it was finalized. I was perturbed because nothing had been cleared by anyone except our two investigators.

The investigators had decided to find a person in New London to house the complainant's child. The New London residence would permit the child to go to New London High School. It took the investigators a long time to find a home for the child. We had no idea they were going about it in this way. In fact, I forgot they had the case because of their lack of communication with the governing body. When they came forward with their solution, I felt sorry for them—but not sorry enough not to veto the

deal they had made. If it had not been a NAACP case, I would have cared much less. But the NAACP was involved. The investigators were informed to let the parent know of our feelings on the situation.

I knew it would be embarrassing for our people to explain to the parent, but we had our reputation to protect. Before the parent could be called, however, the parent called us and withdrew the complaint. Although I never discovered the reason the parent back-tracked, I did discover that changing a child's residence was a rather common practice. And while I am not against the procedure per se, for me to support it, the parent would have to make these arrangements. For the organization to lead the way, to me, is dishonest.

A case that brought embarrassment and an apology involved a man who was terminated from his place of employment for lost time and lying. One of his close relatives had died, and the man took time off to attend the funeral. Nothing seemed wrong with that. Because his company was out of the area, and because it was an equal opportunity employer, we decided not to handle the complaint ourselves. We filed the complaint with another governmental agency. Several weeks later, the man called to say that he had lost his case. He insisted a relative had died, and the company had mistreated him. I secured the name of the investigator who had processed the complaint. I talked to the complainant again before I contacted the investigator. Our client did not deviate from his story. With this information, I contacted the investigator. He told me he had "washed that case out. Your man does not have a case." I did not believe him and told him that and more.

I guess I should have left well enough alone. But I needed proof that our client had given us wrong information. Rather than tell me what he had, the investigator mailed it to me. I could not believe what I was reading. I was sent a copy of the obituary concerning the man's relative. What a shocker. The relative had passed several years earlier!

After I became involved in NAACP activities, there were a number of incidents that involved the police, lawyers, or both. When I first became a board member in the late 1950s, one of our clients needed an attorney. The attorney the client obtained was also the attorney for the opponent. How that case was resolved, I am not sure. All I remember is that when the NAACP sought legal advice, we were told it was unethical for the attorney to represent both parties, a situation I tried to keep from recurring on my watch.

One incident while I was president had a humorous ending. Another ended in tragedy. The tragic episode involved a man named Arthur Wright. Mr. Wright was a welder at EB. There had been an altercation between Wright and a female that led to the arrest of both. In court, Wright pleaded guilty to the charge. I was told by the prosecutor that if Wright's plea was not a guilty one, he could have walked out of court a free man. That was because of the woman's reputation. She was constantly in court. But because the female was convicted, and Wright pleaded guilty, they both were sentenced to terms. A fellow employee of Wright contacted me on behalf of Wright's foreman. If we could get Wright out of jail before a certain time, his job could be saved. If he came out of jail after that time, his job would be lost. The following day, Saturday, I went to the County Jail in Montville to visit Wright.

I knew nothing about jail visits. I thought all one had to do was to go during the daytime. I recall the jailer telling me that just lawyers could visit. With that, I knew I



wasn't eligible for visitation rights. I was disappointed, and I guess it showed. Then the jailer made me feel good; he said, "I guess the work you do can classify you as a lawyer. Go on in. We'll get him for you." It was just that simple. I relayed Wright's foreman's message to him. I told him, if he wanted me to, I would try to find an attorney to get him out so he wouldn't lose his job. I told him the lawyer would be his responsibility if I could get one to take the case.

I was soon to discover that Mr. Wright had a tricky case. I was given the name of a lawyer who I hooked up with Wright's wife. My obligation, if I had one, had ended. I had made it clear to all parties, including the attorney, that Arthur Wright would be responsible for the fees.

After I called the attorney, and he had met with Mrs. Wright, he did some legal footwork. The attorney called me to say there was a huge problem. When he explained the problem to me, I didn't see any problem at all. He told me the female was still incarcerated. Arthur Wright could not be released if his victim was still in jail for the same altercation. At least that's the way I interpreted what he was saying. I told him, "Do the best you can." I had no idea what would occur after that. I believe that I pushed Arthur Wright out of my mind. I don't think that I heard anything further until Wright visited me. He thanked me and said he wanted to join the NAACP. I obliged him. I can't recall whether it was months or years, but some time after Mr. Wright's jail ordeal, the radio carried details of his death. Arthur Wright, leaving Westerly, Rhode Island, drove his automobile in the northbound lanes of Interstate 1-95 and was killed. He was driving south to New London. That was the tragedy.

The other incident, as far as I was concerned, had a somewhat comical ending. A teenager had been arrested and charged with an assault in New London. As far as I can remember, the incident occurred somewhere near the Mohican Hotel. The young man claimed to us that he had been nowhere in the vicinity. From what I can remember, he told a credible story.

There were, we were told, two alleged witnesses. Board member Peter Seng asked permission to try finding the truth of the matter. When Seng was satisfied that the young man could be believed, he told me the youngster needed a lawyer. I made an appointment with a downtown New London attorney, and took the youngster with me. I don't know what else could have been a problem, but the young man had a mole on his chin. The lawyer seemed so intrigued with that mole. He even asked what the significance of the mole was. The young man told him the mole was a birthmark. It seemed that the lawyer saw something sinister in that mole, and it seemed to me that the lawyer was sensing gang involvement. As far as I could tell, the fellow was answering the queries quite adequately. Then I spoke up. I told the attorney that we were quite sure of the youth's innocence. That didn't go over very well.

"You guys have been intimidating state's witnesses," he told me. "You could get in trouble," is the way he put it. I didn't think that we had done anything wrong. But the lawyer seemed irritated because we had talked to witnesses of the event.

When the youngster went to court, the charges were dismissed. We never heard anymore about the case from the defense counsel. But the youngster's father stopped by





*Above*, Y Club. Tiny's Heatwave, 1945. Left to right, Christine Barton, Constance Patton, Lillian Harris, Harriet Weaver, Albertha Ware, Deletha Coleman, Bernice Sanchez, unidentified man, Eliza Brown, Ruth Leeks, Mary Talbot, Jeanette Harris, Alverta Fields, Helen Sanchez. *Carol Brown Clarke*



*Above*, March of mourners, September 20, 1963, in memory of young girls who died in Birmingham, Alabama, church bombing. Linwood Bland leads procession up State Street, followed by Rev. A.A. Garvin, Rev. Richard Campbell (barely visible) Rev. Jack Madry, Rev. James McDougal, Deacon Otis Brown, and others. *New London Public Library*

**Right,** Reverend Albert A. Garvin, Sr., a former African Methodist Episcopal Zion Minister, became 8th pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church, in 1937. He served his parishioners for 27 years, until 1964. *Martha Garvin*



**Above,** Frances and Carl Taylor (mother and uncle of Bessie Taylor) on Hill Street, 1926. *Bessie Montford*

**Right,** Float depicting San Juan Hill in Armistice Day parade, November 11, 1933. Left to right, Linwood Bland, Sr., J. Seay, J.H. Brown, J. Browne, C. Hamilton, L. Eccleston. *George Brown*





*Left, Float depicting Battle of Fort Griswold is displayed on Morgan Court, Groton, 1945. Robert Jordan*



*Above, Masonic Lodge party, 1949, at Hempstead Street Hall. Left to right, L'Overature "Luke" Harris, Jeanette Harris, Louis Sheldon, Alice Sheldon, Ralph Hannon (partially hidden), Arlene Andreas, Jehu Rookard, Olive Place, Mary Popham, William Popham, unidentified (partially hidden), Marjorie Knowles, Susan Battles, John Battles, Boothe Miller, Becky Miller. Arlene Scott*

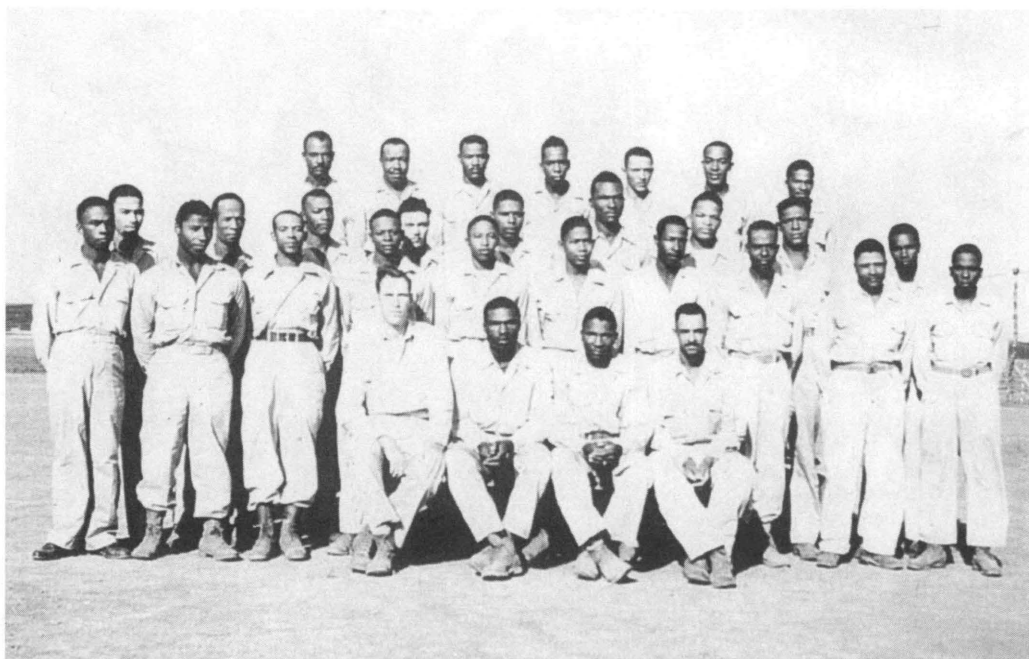


*Above*, New London "Colored Giants" circa 1933. Bottom row, left to right, Johnny Browne, Morris Browne, George Sparrow, Clarence Brown, Irving Bland, Irving "Casey" Gilliam. Top row, left to right, Linwood "Red Bland," Harry "Slim Boy Simpson, unidentified, Albert "Bootsie" Brown, Luke Harris, Morton Jeffers. *Carol Brown Clarke*



*Above*, Yergan Baseball Team, 1927-28. Bottom row, left to right, Irving "Rip" Bland, William Lyons, Clarence Brown, Henry Fulford, Sr. Top row, left to right, Irving "Casey" Gilliam, L"Overature "Luke" Harris, Mickey Price, William Jackson, Albert "Bootsie" Brown. *James "Sonny" Brown*





*Above*, Tony Andreas, front row, second from left, with his company on a Pacific Island in 1945. (*Arlene Scott*)



*Above*, Morgan Park All Star Baseball Team, 1933. Front row, left to right, Freddie Mallett, Joe Rinoski, Al Gonsalves, Mike Butchka, Joe Stublick, Linwood Bland, George Sparrow. Back row, left to right, unidentified, Cal Kirchoff, Louis Pine, Artie Chappel, Red Manwaring, Jake Snoesky, Bert Day, Walter, Smolenski. *Linwood W. Bland, Jr.*



**Above**, 1963 NAACP Black History Celebration, left to right, Jacqueline Dell; Clarence Faulk; Julia Baxter, National NAACP Guest Speaker; Vernice Cook, Linwood Bland; Herman Nathaniel; Bettye Fletcher; Walter Bernard; Jane Torrey, *Linwood Bland*

**Below**, Victor M. Johnson was first black fulltime police officer in the history of New London. Johnson retired as a sergeant. *Victor Johnson*



**Left**, Bennie Dover Jackson, First black teacher. 1985  
*Linwood Bland*



**Left**, Bettye Fletcher, First black principal. 1985.  
*Linwood Bland*



*Above*, Connecticut's NAACP Freedom Train in Washington, D.C., 1961. The delegation met with Senator Prescott Bush. *Linwood Bland*



*Above*, Joseph Coleman, Sr.  
*Emily Coleman*



*Above*, Mother and daughter. Constance Lyles, a graduate of Connecticut College, and her mother, Mabel Lyles, circa 1948. *Lois Hernandez*



**Left**, Civil rights activist Dr. Jane W. Torrey, center, her adopted daughter, Debbie, left, and Linwood Bland, right, 1999. Dr. Torrey, founder of Southeastern Connecticut Chapter of National Organization of Women, was a NAACP secretary and Political Action chairman.  
*Linwood Bland*

**Right**, New London NAACP Banquet, 1999. Foreground, Mildred Ferguson, Clarence Faulk, background, Jane Torrey, left, Sally Ryan, right.  
*Linwood Bland*



**Above**, Shiloh Baptist Church Gospel Chorus. Bottom row, left to right, Ethel Martin, Virginia Story, Emily Hunter, Liz Milligan, Pearl Lancaster, Lucille Holmes, Martha Martin, Susie Wright, Delphina Blackburn. Middle row, left to right, William Story, Frank Dobbins, Laura Morgan, Emma Noble, Jimmie Scott, Linzy Martin, James Hunter, Edward Milligan, Essie Peterson, Harriet Weaver. Top Row, left to right, Jacqueline Garvin, William Weaver, Douglas Noble, George Peterson, Powell Hall, Dennis Martin, Spencer Lancaster, Curtis Scott, Harry Senior, Robert Dantzler, Luther Eccleston, Sr.  
*Laura Ligon*



to see me at a later date. The father told me that the lawyer wasn't worth a quarter. "He didn't help at all," the father said. He then told me something which has lasted with me to this time. "I got my son off," the man told me. "All judges are Masons," he said. "And I knew what to do. I was sitting where the judge couldn't miss seeing me. I kept flashing my Masonic ring in his face. My son had to get off then," he said. Whether that was true or not, I have never forgotten what the father told me.

We also had an occasion where the state police called me to take a young man from the barracks. Otherwise, the young man would be arrested. The fellow was hitch-hiking back to New York and was being detained at the Montville State Police Barracks. He had been a passenger in a truck which had been in an accident. I brought the fellow home and fed him; then, I purchased a train ticket to New York for him. I believe I even gave him cab fare for transportation after he got to New York. At our next executive board meeting, I reported the incident and asked for what I thought I had spent. I was surprised at the negative comments concerning what I had done. I really didn't think it deserved any debate. That's where the surprise came in.

After all the talking had been done, and after I had finished trying to defend my actions, the board refunded me the \$25. Then my good friend and colleague, Jane Torrey, warned me not to let it happen again. How could "it" happen again, being most likely a once-in-a-lifetime occurrence?

I got away with it with only a slap on the wrist. It was true the incident involved no violation of civil rights, but being a humanitarian, I felt it was the decent thing to do. No one on the board spelled it out, but I could sense that they were saying, "You should have let him go to jail." I thought, however, that I exercised my obligation to help a fellow black man. The bylaws were silent on the matter. It was my call to make.

But while some issues were on the light side, most were not comical matters. I hated to think that government agencies could be used to get even with people for exercising their constitutional rights. But it happened to me. When the IRS first called me in for an audit, I thought it made no sense. It was like a joke to me. Again, the following year, a second audit had me before the IRS agents. My friend Homer Reid, taking note of my frequent audits, began telling me, in the 1960s, "The government should be ashamed of itself for doing that to you." In the 1990s, some thirty years after the fact, Reid was still repeating the same thing. Why was I being singled out? I was making something like eighty dollars a week as a garage employee. With my audiences before the IRS, one would think I was making \$80,000 a week. Five times in six years I had to take time off from work to answer the IRS inquiries. Later, the agency requested an audit for the year it had missed. All such annual visits to the IRS office were inconveniences, not to mention nerve-wracking experiences. I lost a lot of time from work as a result of these "revues." I had nothing to hide, but it never occurred to me that I could have publicly shouted that I was a victim of harassment. All I did was go through the motions, hoping they would not find anything wrong with me making eighty dollars a week. Later, after I was out of office, and discussed the IRS with some other individuals, they said they would have "screamed" had it happened to them.

As my local presidency was ending, Richard M. Nixon's national presidency was beginning. I remember thinking how lucky I was to be leaving the spotlight at that point:

I was so glad that I wouldn't be around to publicly challenge the Nixonian civil rights policies. At the time, I strongly suspected that many of the gains made in civil rights prior to the Nixon era would slowly begin to erode. I knew if that happened, and I was still president, there would be no rest. But I had no intention of being in that situation.

### **Selective Service Appointment**

Early in President Nixon's first term, A.A. Washton, New London's Democratic Town Chairman, asked me to serve in the Connecticut Selective Service System. I tried to resist the opportunity because I didn't want the responsibility of drafting anyone. It wasn't because I didn't believe in the draft program. It was because of the unpopularity of the Vietnam conflict. But Washton was a strong and persuasive personality. I had known him for years. As for President Nixon, I gave him no thought at all in connection to Mr. Washton's request. I wasn't thinking of the connection between the national draft system and Connecticut. Recommended by Mr. Washton, I was accepted for a position on Local Board 25. What I didn't know was that the appointment to the drafting unit was a presidential one. So on the 9th day of October 1970, I became, so I was told, the first black person ever to serve on Connecticut's Local Board Number 25.

After the resignation of Nixon, Gerald R. Ford became president, and, in 1975, he sent me a Certificate of Appreciation "for five years of service in the system." Again, in 1976, President Ford sent me another Certificate of Appreciation for "grateful recognition of valuable service contributed to the Nation and the Selective Service System in the administration of the military Selective Service Act."

Being appointed to the Selective Service System by President Nixon was my first contact with his administration. But it certainly was not the last. When I worked at Sullivan Motors during the 1970s, L. Patrick Gray, III, acting FBI Director, was the owner of a Buick automobile. Mr. Gray was one of the customers of the Sullivan garage. That's how I became friendly with him. At the time, there were pervasive rumors of nationwide intelligence reports on private citizens; also there were rumors of secret FBI files on some private citizens, possibly for blackmail purposes. One morning at Sullivan Motors, Mr. Gray assured me that those were only rumors. He told me that there were no secret files. I believed him. After all, he was the one person in position to know whether those rumors were fact or fiction. The important thing about it was, I didn't really care whether the rumors were true or false. I didn't think I could be hurt.

Around this time, I also remember Andrew Kruszewski, a Sullivan Motors co-employee, showing me a picture of President Nixon. The picture was one that Mr. Gray had brought from Washington for the Kruszewski family. I guess I could have a copy of the same picture if I had asked for it. But Richard Nixon was not really my cup of tea. Shortly after, when the truth was finally rolled out before the American public, I think L. Patrick Gray was long gone. There were, indeed, secret files on private citizens.

To this day, I have not been curious enough to see if I was in the files. Lately, however, I have been wondering if Pat Gray had read something in a file somewhere pertaining to me—although not wondering hard enough to contact him for an answer. The way I feel, I don't want to know. Jane Torrey said if she were me, she would want to know what was in her file. My curiosity has not leaned that way. Whatever the skeletons

in my closet were, they were common knowledge. So it didn't matter to me what an investigation, based on facts, showed. Of course, people do tell lies. They do manufacture things that could be harmful to an individual. But I decided that if the government had any files on me, they could keep them.

### **10 Days in March 1964**

Because of the pressures the NAACP was putting on local property owners and businessmen not to discriminate, I knew I personally would have to be careful. Racial discrimination was a daily habit still thriving in southeastern Connecticut. The NAACP was working to bring it to a screeching halt. Sometimes radios and news media were full of reports about our activities. With all this going on, it was natural for me to have forebodings.

I had never been fired from a job because I was very conscientious. I knew if my work was done correctly, no one would have an excuse to fire me. When I worked on an automobile, I would not let it go until I was quite sure there were no obvious problems. That's what I mean by having to be careful. My job counted most to me. If anything, I was so deliberate while working on someone's automobile, I should have been reprimanded for being too slow. I was never called on the carpet for that, though I felt I could have been. Ten days in March of 1964, would forever change my outlook on the economic and emotional cost of civil rights work.

I found there was trouble brewing for me. The first indication of trouble was when Clayton Robinson, another black employee, was hired. He was hired a short time before the trouble started. Although I smelled trouble coming, there was little I could do except wait. I can't specifically recall how long Robinson had worked before the incident occurred, maybe a week, maybe two weeks. All I know is, it was less than a month. When he was hired, I thought it was unusual. I had an odd feeling because something appeared to be wrong, which made me suspicious.

That fateful morning I went to work as usual. The day began as any other ordinary day. My first job was a used automobile that had been sold. The job ticket called for the automobile to be undercoated. The order also called for an oil and filter change. The job was not unusual, other than the car needing an undercoat. I happen to remember that particular automobile. I was returning to New London from Norwich late one evening when I saw the same car sitting near a street corner on Route 32 in Quaker Hill. It had been damaged in an accident. The next time I saw it was on the parking lot where I worked. It had been traded in. That automobile sat on the lot for a long time; maybe four to six months before it was allegedly sold. The front fender was repaired, and I assumed the repair was a condition of the sale. I undercoated the left front fender, and then undercoated other bare spots underneath the entire car. That's what I had been taught to do by other workers at the job who were familiar with undercoating. I had never done any undercoating until I went to work at that garage. I felt I wasn't setting any precedent, since the car had been previously undercoated. That's why I only did the spots with no undercoat on them. I changed the oil and filter, then ran the engine to make sure there were no oil filter leaks. Seeing none, I put the automobile back outside.

In the parking lot, I saw the man who I assumed was the purchaser. The man had the hood up. I thought he was checking the engine. Whether the engine was running at the

time, I did not know. I didn't recognize him as anyone I knew. A few minutes later I was told to bring the car back inside and put it in the air. I couldn't understand what was going on, but something did not fit. After putting the car in the air again, I re-checked it underneath. I checked the tire wear and checked the filter to see if it was leaking. The tires seemed to me to be fine, and the filter wasn't leaking. I waited under the automobile until the service manager, Peter Lennon, Sr., came out. He walked from front to back looking underneath the car. He told me that I had not done a good job undercoating the car. When I asked what was wrong with the undercoating job, he told me that I hadn't done the whole car. He said that the buyer had come in to pick it up and found that the car wasn't undercoated and the oil had not been changed. The buyer became angry and didn't buy the car.

I stood there trying to figure it out. There was nothing wrong with my work. I got a drop light and showed him what I had done on the undercoating job but he still said that I hadn't changed the oil. I thought he was crazy, and I looked at him as such. What else could I do? I had performed the job, and now he was telling me that I hadn't done anything at all. What was coming next? It appeared that I had cleared myself on the undercoating job. I pointed to the new filter on the car, then showed him the old one in the trash barrel. I was trying to defend myself, but it seemed I wasn't doing such a good job. It was then that I realized that Lennon wasn't going to be proven wrong. Then came the crowning blow. "Well, what do you want me to do?" I asked. I figured he was going to tell me to spray the entire car underneath and drain the oil again. He said neither. He told me to stay here and he'd get my paycheck. He walked off as I stood there not believing what I had just heard. Now I could see why the other black man had been hired. I put my tools in my box and was ready when he returned with my check. I drove home and parked my car. I went into the house, but I didn't stay. I walked downtown to the bank. I was confused about the situation. How could I have let that happen to me when there was no reason for it?

I knew there was something terribly wrong, but I couldn't figure out what it was. What they claimed I didn't do to the car was wrong. If they had given the automobile to someone else, it would have been done the exact same way. We all performed the job the same way. I thought to myself how I had helped others over the past year and how I now was trying to figure out a way to help myself. Handling someone else's problems seemed so easy. Now I was caught in a bind, apparently with no solution. My firing was mighty smelly, but I needed more than just my suspicions. I needed a lead, but I was at a loss where to start. Questions kept going around in my head, but answers eluded me. I had said nothing about my being fired to anyone, including my parents. But I knew something would have to be said to them by morning. There would have to be a reason why I wasn't going to work.

I met Luther Eccleston, Sr., while I was downtown. We spoke to each other and, as I walked past him, he stopped me. I had no idea what he wanted with me and was in no mood for a conversation. But what Mr. Eccleston had to say interested me very much. "Reverend J. Sidney Wilson really shook Henry L. Bailey up," he said. I knew a Henry Bailey, but I wanted to confirm he was the same man. I asked Mr. Eccleston which Henry Bailey he was talking about. Eccleston answered, "The one at the bank. Reverend Wilson had him shaking. Bailey said no one ever talked to him the way Wilson did." As far as I was concerned, Mr. Eccleston had supplied some key information. I could not believe

that my firing and Reverend Wilson's confrontation with Bailey were unconnected since Wilson was a NAACP board member.

Mr. Eccleston told me several other things, then added, "You can ask Frank Dover, he's the one who told me." Besides being a janitor at the bank, Dover was also a courier. I went to the bank and waited outside for Dover to come out. When he did, we walked up State Street. Dover told me what he knew, or what he heard had transpired between Reverend Wilson and Henry Bailey. "The girls were talking about how Wilson upset Mr. Bailey. Wilson demanded that Bailey hire some colored tellers, and Bailey got as red as a beet," Dover told me. I don't know whether Dover was in the bank at the time of the confrontation, but he told a most credible story. I asked if he would come to a meeting the following evening. I requested that he tell the story to our executive board. He told me he would be glad to come.

I returned home feeling good about the situation. I called the board members and told them about my firing. I also told them a meeting would be held the following evening at 5 p.m. to hear what Mr. Dover had to say. The meeting, an emergency one, was held at Shiloh Baptist Church. I asked Dover to relate the story he had told me the previous day. If it hadn't been for the seriousness of the situation, it would have been a big joke. Dover stood up and said, in effect, he didn't know anything. He began with "Like I told Mr. Douton ...." Whatever he told Douton was altogether different from what he had told me. Peter Seng said he didn't think "Mr. Dover can contribute anything else to enlighten us."

Mr. Dover was dismissed from the meeting. I knew as soon as he mentioned Mr. Douton, I was sunk. Douton was the secretary of the bank, and Bailey was the executive vice-president. It would have been helpful if Dover had told the executive board what he had told me, but he didn't. I was sure Mr. Eccleston was truthful, and I also knew what Dover had told me the previous day. At least I had something to go on, but was it enough to get something started? I then contacted Reverend A. A. Garvin with the story. He followed through by contacting Mr. Eccleston. I figured with Mr. Eccleston being one of Shiloh's deacons, he would tell Reverend Garvin all he knew, or all he had heard. A little while later, Reverend Garvin called me back. He said Mr. Eccleston had confirmed what Dover had initially said about the Wilson and Bailey confrontation. Reverend Garvin said he would go to the garage and speak on my behalf.

He did go, then reported back to the executive board: "Mr. Sullivan said that he definitely will not take you back," Reverend Garvin said. I knew I was in the right, and I wasn't giving up. Reverend Garvin was my first try. Clarence Faulk, our labor and industry chairman, said he would like to have a crack at getting my job back. I told him I would try to work it out another way. I put in a call to the Civil Rights Commission in Hartford. Field Representative Angelo Serlucca came to my house. I related to him the story as I knew it and also told him that Reverend Garvin had visited the garage. Serlucca wrote out the complaint with the story I had told him. I read it to make sure he hadn't made any mistakes. Finding none, I signed the complaint.

Serlucca went to the garage and was back at my house in about two hours. Serlucca said of Sullivan, "He's stubborn." I asked him to try to get the name of the person who Lennon said had intended to purchase the automobile. I felt that I had been the victim of a shoddily planned set-up. I felt then, as I do now, the supposed purchaser could supply

important additional information. Serlucca rejected that idea for the time being. He said that if things didn't work out, he would get the name, but that he probably wouldn't need it. "I'll be back in a couple of days," Serlucca said. Maybe Serlucca had detected something during the visit. I did not like the waiting game, but I decided to bide my time. I would await Serlucca's return to New London. Between the time Serlucca was in New London and the two days he was to return, Reverend Wilson called me.

I can't remember specifically where he said he had been, but he said he had been out of town somewhere. "I understand that I have caused you a problem," Wilson said, "and if I did, I'm sorry." I told him he should submit his resignation. He said he didn't think he had to do that. Wilson became ruffled because I had asked him to resign. I told him he went to the bank without being authorized to do so. I reminded him of another time he did something without authorization. "That was such a small matter, you should have forgotten about it" was his reply. But I didn't consider it a small matter at all. He had used my identity to further his personal goals.

How could I forget, or forgive, someone for doing that? Reverend Wilson was an intelligent person. But somehow he felt he could use my name to accomplish something he couldn't do personally. I don't remember who gave me the information, but I came by it somehow. Reverend Wilson was either trying to do himself a favor, or he was trying to do a favor for someone else. He or a friend of his had an account at Sears Roebuck. Apparently, the payments were in arrears, and Sears demanded payments on the account. Reverend Wilson tried the personal approach at Sears. When that didn't work, he went somewhere and called back to the store. He said he was "Linwood Bland, President of the NAACP." He asked to speak to the manager.

When I confronted Reverend Wilson with the fact, he readily admitted doing it. He told me he had tried to talk to someone at Sears and they wouldn't listen. That's when he made the phone call. I went to Sears and talked to the manager. He verified receiving a call from someone who said he was me. He said he couldn't believe that someone, the head of our organization, would be so nasty. The manager thanked me for straightening the matter out, and I thanked him for verifying that the call had been made. I also apologized to the manager. I brought the matter up at an executive board meeting without mentioning Wilson's name. Mrs. Donald Myers said, "Anyone who would do that needs his head examined." Reverend Wilson thought her serious remark was funny. He laughed at Mrs. Myers' statement, as if it were the funniest thing he had ever heard. I reported his actions to the National NAACP Office. They told me I should sue Wilson. With the termination from my job, Reverend Wilson had done something far more serious than the Sears incident. His actions resulted in my loss of income. This second offense was far too serious for me to ignore. The executive board voted to ask Reverend Wilson for his resignation. It voted to send him a letter, and suggested that he resign, giving his own reasons. The letter was dated March 8, 1964. We wanted him to go so badly that we would have accepted his resignation regardless of the excuse he used. Reverend Wilson's reply was on the back of the letter we had sent to him asking for his resignation. His answer to us was, "Bland, this is of little or no consequence to me. As you wish, consider it done. I think though this is of a personal issue with you." It was signed "J.S. Wilson"

Evidently Reverend Wilson's reply wasn't sufficient. The executive board voted to take still further action. It paid *The Day* to print the following one line notification from



the New London branch, National Association for the Advancement for Colored People, “Reverend J. Sidney Wilson has been dismissed for cause.”

Previously, Reverend Wilson was on the redevelopment committee. There was a great deal of work to be done. Redevelopment was an ongoing project with many different problems which Wilson’s committee could have tackled. But the committee apparently was not as active as Wilson wanted it to be. He was an activist, and being one, he felt we were too slow acting. We were definitely looking for activists, but the unfortunate part of Reverend Wilson’s activism was we did not know what he was doing. Or at least I didn’t. As I have said, trying to break new ground in that period, prior to passage of federal civil rights legislation, was always dangerous. Anyone undertaking such a task was foolish to try without being backed up. His energies were boundless, but he used the organization in ways other than what was intended.

Reverend Wilson, when stumped in finding a solution to a personal problem, would interject himself as an emissary of the NAACP. Because I personally told him I didn’t appreciate what he was doing, Reverend Wilson referred to me as a “despot” and an “iron-handed ruler” with too much authority. Those were perilous times. We couldn’t afford to have loose cannons running amok, using the organization as a backup when cornered. I could find no evidence of Wilson having a personal vendetta against the bank. At one time, it was rumored he had applied for a personal loan at the bank and was turned down, but I was not able to verify any part of that rumor.

What I was able to verify was that sometime in January, Wilson paid a visit to the bank. He asked to speak with someone in authority. Eventually, he had an encounter with Henry Bailey. Whatever transpired between the two men is a matter of speculation. I spoke with Joe Sullivan about the Wilson/Bailey encounter, “It’s hard to believe anyone could shake up Henry Bailey,” Sullivan said. Maybe it was hard for him to believe it, but Sullivan did not know how overbearing Reverend Wilson could be.

I think Joe Sullivan was used. I think he realized this during those ten days in March 1964. I believe whatever happened at the bank that day had a direct impact on me and that it could have had a disastrous effect on the entire city. Should that have happened, it could have taken years to remove the scars. I feel quite sure, after sifting through the comments and evidence, that at least one member of the executive board knew of Wilson’s activities. If the member didn’t know before the fact, then it was certainly shortly thereafter. After the ill-fated encounter with Bailey, Wilson finally realized it was a disaster because he had never cleared his bank visit with the executive board or me. If any others knew he was going to the bank, they never admitted it. Two others—bank employees—speaking with anonymity, confirmed that Wilson had confronted Bailey. Though it happened, most everyone said they didn’t know anything about it. The NAACP branch’s April 18, 1964, edition of the *Conscience* carried this editorial:

*About Snakes and Things...*

*Down South they say the way to kill a snake is to chop off its head.*

*Well, that may work with real snakes, but it won’t work with the civil rights movement. Alabama was trying to chop off heads when she kicked*

*the NAACP out of the state. But branches in other states poked up their heads and are now fighting back in the courts. Racists in Florida tried it when they demanded membership lists from branches in that state; they were trying to find out where to do the chopping. But the law stopped those choppers in their tracks. Here up north segregationists are sneakier. Up here they work through chambers of commerce, businesses, banks, and real estate agencies.*

*They think they can kill the civil rights movement by attacking its leaders. They think they can keep the profit in segregation by evicting CR workers from their apartments, getting them fired from their jobs, or by branding them as "Communists."*

*Well, we've got some news for those sneaky segregationists. We've got some news for those hatchetmen: YOU CAN'T KILL THIS SNAKE BY CHOPPING OFF ITS HEAD!*

*This snake isn't some tired old blacksnake called Tom. This isn't someone's pet snake who's going to jump through your hoops, or crawl humbly in the dust at your heels. No siree. This snake is a strong young snake that's growing bigger and stronger everyday. This snake's got more heads than you've got axes. This snake's a miracle snake: chop off one head and two more grow in its place. This snake's a muscular snake: trample on it, and it can squeeze off votes at the ballotbox and profits in your business. This snake's a long snake; he reaches from here to Hartford, to New York, and even to Washington, D.C. He's a coast-to-coast snake, a black-and-white snake, and his name's "Freedom Now!"*

*We hope the segregationists and hatchet-men in New England haven't forgotten their American history. It won't do any harm to remind them. Once upon a time there was another fight for freedom in this country, and that one had a snake, too. Way back in 1775, when the colonies were fighting for freedom they had a flag, and the flag had a snake on it, and the snake had a motto: "Don't tread on me!"*

*Welcome back, old freedom snake. What's that you say? Say it again so everyone can hear it. Say it again so everyone can read us loud and clear:*

**"DON'T TREAD ON ME!"**

If memory serves, that editorial was the work of Peter J. Seng. I remember discussing it with him before it was written. He did an excellent job, writing well and to the point. The editorial served its purpose well, also. The message did come through loud and clear.

The more I think about the "10 Days in March," the more difficult it is to bring closure to the story without mentioning other pertinent information that factored in as a part of my case. The hiring and dismissal of Clayton Robinson at critical times was a "smoking gun." But that wasn't all. First, the New London Federal Savings and Loan Association at 15 Masonic Street, New London, had a direct tie-in with Sullivan Motors.



The son of Peter Lennon, Sr., was an employee at that bank. After listening to Frank Dover's description of the Bailey/Wilson confrontation, I returned to my former place of employment. I saw Clayton Robinson performing tasks that I had previously done. But I didn't go there for that. I went to talk to Mr. Lennon, the man who had terminated me.

If what Dover had told me was true, and I believed it was, Lennon, Jr., the bank employee, must have surely told his dad of the Wilson incident. But when I mentioned the Wilson/Bailey confrontation, the service manager told me that he hadn't heard about it. I wasn't about to call him a liar. But I did know the man who was my supervisor was friendly with many influential people at the bank. And, of course, as mentioned, his son, who in the future would be president of that bank, worked there.

If I could remember all of the names, I could name at least a dozen employees at that bank who had purchased automobiles at Sullivan Motors. Some bought new automobiles, while others purchased used ones. But new or used, most of those owners brought their autos back to Sullivan's for service. Those owners included Henry Bailey, William Douton, and Lennon's son, who also owned a Buick. I'm not saying that any, or all, of those bank employees had a part in my firing. I'm saying that it was highly unlikely that Peter Lennon, Sr., didn't know anything of the Wilson incident until I mentioned it to him. I will go to my grave believing that.

After those horrendous ten days reached their conclusion, I returned to my Jay Street place of employment. Needless to say, from that day forward it was business as usual. It was back to the housing problems, and to the employment problems, and to the business of civil rights in general.

Some executive board members had been meeting in secret sessions. They had decided that if the Civil Rights Commission couldn't get my job back, which was try number two, then they were going to try number three. Try number three was to set up picket lines at the garage. I wasn't told of that decision until Serlucca said Sullivan was stubborn. Serlucca had left saying he would return in a couple of days. I had mixed emotions, and I was all for the picketing action, but only if everything else had failed. If Serlucca failed in his attempt to get my job back, I would have had plenty of time to walk a picket line. But I sincerely hoped that Serlucca would succeed. In that way, we could keep everything as silent as it had been. I just did not want any blown-up affair because of me.

I found out about the "secret" meetings through Bob Strecker, a *Day* reporter. He called me and told me of the meetings. Serlucca did return to New London in two days. He told me to stay around the house and be available if he should need me. He left my house and hadn't been gone long when I got a call from him. He asked me to come to the garage. Serlucca didn't indicate what decision had been reached, but I became optimistic.

I reasoned that if he had failed, he would have come back to the house and told me. He certainly would send a letter from Hartford. Sullivan, Serlucca, and I sat in the office. To me it was an awkward meeting, but I had to be there to hear what decision they had made. Joe Sullivan was the first to speak. He told me he had figured out why the crankcase oil was black. He told me, even though I had put in fresh oil in the crankcase, the automobile had been sitting for months, and the sediment that had been on the bottom of the oil pan, didn't come out. The new oil was put in, and when the engine was started,

the sludge mixed and caused the new oil to turn black. I had told Serlucca the same thing prior to his going to the garage. But whatever had happened, I knew I had changed the oil in that engine.

Sullivan didn't say anything about the undercoat. I was the one to bring that up. I asked Serlucca if he wanted to see the undercoat job. I wanted someone else to see if there was any reason for me to be fired. Serlucca begged off. He said that even if he saw it, he wouldn't know whether the undercoat job was a good one or not. Serlucca told me they had worked out an agreement. He said they had agreed the time I was out would be used as a suspension. It was a compromise I didn't like. I didn't like being used as a scapegoat, but I accepted the role by agreeing to return to work under those conditions. My prime consideration was, I still would be accessible to others. The location was ideal.

Another reason why I accepted the compromise was that I wanted to get something off my chest. I told Sullivan what the others had planned to do if I wasn't returned to work. Serlucca didn't like the idea of my telling Sullivan. But I thought it was best to do it that way rather than to let him hear it later from someone else. In this way it was all in the open. And if he heard it later, he was already apprised of the fact. If there were any hard feelings, I would rather it would be then and there, not a year from then. I really felt sorry for Joe Sullivan. But it was more before I was fired than after. Angelo Santaniello, our former NAACP attorney, and later a State Supreme Court Justice, also felt sorry for him. Judge Santaniello asked me one day, "How's Joe Sullivan taking it?"

Judge Santaniello was speaking of my NAACP activities. All I could answer was, "I don't know." I answered him truthfully. I didn't know how Sullivan was taking it. I knew he would get questions about my activities. At the time, he was president of the Greater New London Chamber of Commerce. I could see no way for him to have felt nothing. If he were having problems, I'm sure I was the cause of some of them. My father, a bartender at the Mohican Hotel, would come home and tell me of people making comments. He often said he wished I would "get out of that thing."

I returned to work at the garage, and was to work there for eleven more years. Sullivan sold out after ten years, and I worked for the new owner for one. Sullivan attended one of our functions after I returned to work. After the affair, he told me that I should go into politics. I had to give him an answer I had once heard Dick Gregory use, "When you get into politics, you lose your freedom of speech." I didn't want any party—Democrat, Republican, Independent, or any others—to tell me what I could or couldn't say. When I returned to work, I was the recipient of verbal abuse from some fellow employees who didn't like the idea of my returning. I don't think they had a dislike for me as a person, but I was a black symbol, a symbol that represented a threat to the community as they knew it. It was some time after I had returned to work that I realized how naive Joe Sullivan was. I had asked myself if he was part of a conspiracy. I concluded he had not been. But he did not hesitate to tell Reverend Garvin I would never be in his employ again.

I soon discovered that symbols are targets of violent threats. Alan Camassar, our parts man, tipped me off. He told me there was "talk" among my fellow employees about beating you up after work. I thanked him. I then prepared to meet the attack with help from one of my friends. I tried several times to reach him on the phone because I wanted him to be there

when I came out of the building after work. I felt the two of us could cut the odds down quite a bit, but after failing to reach him, I knew I might be all alone. As the afternoon wore on, a couple of my co-workers taunted me openly and repeatedly with the words, "There's going to be a hot time in the old town tonight."

When I finally realized that I would be facing this conflict by myself, I took a trash barrel outside. Inside the barrel was a steel rod that I put near my automobile. I didn't know what my co-workers plans were, but I knew that if I could get to my car, I would stand a chance. One huge question loomed in my mind. Who would be the first to leave the building?

To get a head start to the steel rod, I had to make sure I left first. As the day drew to a close, someone else had something to say that I didn't quite understand. I do know it was something to do with my well-being. I bided my time, waiting. I was as ready as could be under the circumstances. It was just a question of when or where. I hoped the "where" would be when I put the steel rod in my hand.

I put my tools away early that evening, intending to be the first outside. The distance to my automobile was only about fifty or sixty feet. I thought that if I could make it to my car, the "hot time" would be had by all, instead of just the few. When time came to punch the clock, I was the first in line. I walked straight to the rear door without looking back.

Once outside, I didn't run to my automobile, but I did lengthen my strides. Even so, it seemed the car was still a long way off. I don't know who followed me out of the door because I did not turn around. No one said anything to me. I opened the car door, took the steel rod, and put it on the seat. I didn't close the car door because I didn't want to be caught inside. I heard an automobile door slam, and looked in that direction. It was Alan, the person who had tipped me off. I waved to him. He started his car but did not drive off. As I sat there, legs hanging outside of the opened door, I began to see some of my co-workers driving off. As the last one went out of the driveway, apparently heading home, I started my auto. I drove out to the street, and as I was turning right, my tipster was turning left.

With a smile on his face, he blew his horn at me to get my attention. I acknowledged him, blowing my horn in return. I also smiled in his direction, and we drove our separate ways. I have often wondered about Alan Camassar. If an altercation had broken out, would he have come to my defense? I guess I'll never know. I do know I appreciated what he had done for me.

That was the last time anything of that nature happened on the job in the eleven years I worked there. There were other incidents, minor in nature, but never anything as big. But there was a casualty as the result of my returning to work. Clayton Robinson was the victim. I had wondered, in the event that Serlucca had been successful, what would happen to Robinson. In fact, if my memory is correct, I told Robinson, when he was first hired, that it was strange they had hired him. We hadn't needed any additional help. Shortly after I had returned to work, the company fired him. I never talked to Robinson again. I have no idea what the discussions were concerning Clayton Robison. A reasonable person would conclude there was a certain amount of dishonesty in his case. In think I'm a reasonable person.

Clayton Robinson was a victim without relief. At the time, federal civil rights legislation was nonexistent. If he had gone to the State Civil Rights Commission, he would have drawn a blank. I felt sorry for Robinson then, and I feel sorry for him now, but he would have had not relief had he attempted to have us intervene on his behalf. That is probably the reason I never talked to him about the matter.

During my time working in garages, I engaged in a pet project that required little effort. I noticed that, as with many other forms of employment, new car delivery truckers coming into the New London area were all white men—the direct result of discrimination patterns. Those trailer operators transported new automobiles from factories to dealerships. I worked in new car garages until 1977, over twenty years. During the 1960s, I saw a change take place. My pet project, over those years, was watching drivers go from segregated units to integrated ones. Watching the changes taking place gave me a mighty good feeling.

My 1964 firing created a trauma of monumental proportions for me. But there were other events, not quite as devastating or dramatic, which managed to find their way to my doorstep. One such event, although not as devastating as the sudden firing, had its impact, and left its scars.

Retributions for my civil rights activities were always a threat. In 1966, my past involvement caught up with me. I'm not saying that I can prove what occurred was because of a case we were pursuing. All I can do is relate the facts, and leave it to history. The episode began a couple of years earlier in a juvenile court case. The case involved a lad who was in a fight after school on one of New London's school playgrounds. Judge Thomas E. Troland was the presiding judge. A school official said the youth should be punished severely. But when the youngster went to court, Judge Troland, for reasons unknown to me, found no grounds to punish the youth and the case was dismissed. The following day, the young man returned to his classroom. The principal sent him back home, insisting, "You've got to go back to court." The youth protested, telling the principal his case had been dismissed. But this meant nothing to the school official, "I want you back in court."

When we received the call from his mother, the lad had been out of school over a week waiting for his court date. From the way the child's mother described it, her son was being tried twice for the same offense. We checked her story and discovered the school official was dissatisfied with the judge's decision. It was assumed that the principal's argument prevailed since the youngster was ordered to court for a second trial. To reinstate the charge against the youth had to constitute double jeopardy, I felt. Although I had no idea how the Constitution distinguished between adults and children, I thought both groups were protected equally. As far as I could determine, no rulings concerning young people and double jeopardy had been made at that time.

Several years after our case, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on the issue as it applied to juveniles. The court ruled that youths were to be afforded the same protection as adults. It was unfortunate that this case, in which we were deeply involved, was one for which we could do very little. It predated the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling. So when we were contacted, I had assumed the youngster was about to become a victim of double jeopardy. Believing my reasoning correct, I contacted Arthur Johnson of the State Civil

Rights Commission. I discussed the case with Johnson to see what his feelings were. He also assumed the Constitutional clause applied to juveniles.

When the boy's case was held, Johnson was there. He said he would raise the assumed Constitutional issue. For some reason, I felt that I should not go to court that day. It wasn't that I had no interest. I simply did not want to go. After court, Johnson stopped to tell me what had happened. I had figured that everything went fine. But what Johnson told me was a troubling and shocking bit of news. The judge wouldn't even have let me into the courtroom. Johnson said he never had the chance to bring up any constitutional issues. He told me the youngster was tried and found guilty of the charge which originally had been dismissed. As a result, the junior high school student was given a probationary sentence. (Recently, I talked to the now grown man. He told me he had been given a year's probation. The NAACP went no further in that case. We were hoping the commission would take it an additional step. But, to our dismay, the case was no longer pursued.)

Shortly thereafter, I had to go before Judge Troland, regarding a personal matter in connection with redevelopment. My house was in the redevelopment area. The Redevelopment Agency had offered me a price for it, but I was not satisfied with the offer. Therefore, I retained the services of an appraiser and an attorney. I appealed to the courts for relief. Judge Troland was among a panel of judges hearing appeals from disgruntled homeowners. I knew that if the judge remembered the youngster's case, I was on shaky ground. Then, the word came down. I had drawn Judge Troland. In court, while my appraiser of Reiss Associates in Norwich and the attorneys for both sides, Matthew Shafner and C. Robert Satti, were arguing my case, the judge was busy. He was reading papers pertaining to a meeting he had attended earlier that morning. He wasn't attentive at all. I wondered how much the judge was hearing. When it was over, Judge Troland said he would go sometime in the near future to view my property. I told the judge that we had moved out nearly a year earlier and that in the meantime, vandals had wrecked the place. He said he would go and look anyway.

I wouldn't have appealed the offer for my property if the Redevelopment Agency officials had any integrity. Agency officials, in their efforts to get the program off the ground, had promised something they were not willing to back up. At least they were not willing to admit to me that they had misled the citizens of New London. I had attended the pre-redevelopment meetings religiously. Because I was a property owner in the area involved, I wanted all the information possible. Many times I heard officials tell how offers would be made for properties. The officials explained that three offers would be made. The first offer, they told us would probably be refused by the property owner. If the owner refused the first offer, a second offer would be made. That second offer could conceivably be higher than the first. Some owners might accept the second offer, officials said, but if they didn't accept the second offer, a third would be made, which, we were told, could also be refused. That third offer could conceivably be a little higher than the second. Then, if the owner refused the third and last offer, the money then offered would be put into an escrow account. That's what officials told citizens of New London. With the last offer in escrow, the owner could either change his mind and take the money, or appeal to the courts. Regardless of what the courts decided, those officials told New Londoners, the money put into escrow belonged to the owner. That's what Redevelopment Agency officials had citizens of New London believing.

I was among those who had been hoodwinked into believing that tale. What I was eventually told was that there was no escrow account, and if I turned down the third offer, it would revert back to the first offer. I began to make telephone calls. But all the calls were in vain. I couldn't find anyone who would tell me, or who even remotely remembered anyone saying money would be put into escrow. I knew I wasn't out of my mind back in 1962. But it seemed I was the only one with a memory of what officials had told us. I called Mrs. Isser Gruskin. Mrs. Gruskin had been an active participant at those 1962 meetings. She didn't remember the escrow account either. She told me the Redevelopment Agency had taken her property, an abandoned gasoline station on the corner of Huntington and Shapley Streets. She told me the agency purchased the property for somewhere around \$45,000. She said she was shocked and surprised they offered her so much. I was shocked and surprised, also. I knew of that property. Where the station was formerly now looked like a jungle: Trees, grass, and junk had taken over. But I had to find someone who remembered what agency officials had declared early on. I knew I had heard it, and I wondered why no one else remembered.

I was almost out of my mind until I remembered Miss Ellen Tarry in New York. I had met Miss Tarry here in New London. She was associated with the Urban Renewal Administration, and had traveled in and out of New London during the pre-redevelopment period. She had attended many of the meetings I had attended. Miss Tarry told me she remembered what local officials had said about the handling of the third and final offer. I explained my problem to Miss Tarry. She wanted to know when the court date was. She told me she didn't know what she could do, but she said she would try to figure out something. I was still waiting to hear from Miss Tarry the morning I went to court. Of course, she had not promised me anything. She had only said she would try to figure out something.

When I arrived for court, Herbert Riess, my appraiser, and Matthew Shafner, my attorney, were ready. But C. Robert Satti, attorney for the Redevelopment Agency, later to become the State's Chief Prosecuting Attorney, began to make his move. Attorney Satti approached me as I entered the door. He told me that he had a letter that might help me. I assumed the letter was from Ellen Tarry, although Attorney Satti didn't say where it was from. I couldn't wait for Attorney Satti to read the letter to the court. I also had to wonder how Judge Troland would receive the news.

It didn't occur to me until years later that the judge was probably more aware of that letter than I was. I even neglected to ask Attorney Shafner if Attorney Satti had contacted him when the letter was received. Attorney Satti read the letter at the beginning of the court session: Miss Tarry explained that she was at those meetings and had heard the same things that I had heard. Because of Miss Tarry's letter, I was allowed to keep the money for the third and final offer. When the judge inspected my abandoned property, he rendered his decision. I paid and paid and paid. What the judge did for me, I considered a crime. He allowed me only a few dollars over the money from the final offer. Those dollars were so few, so meager, neither Attorney Shafner nor Appraiser Reiss charged me anything for their services. It was explained to me, after the decision was rendered, that I had been robbed. But no one had to tell me what had happened in that courtroom.

Miss Tarry called me before I could put in a call to her. She wanted to know if the letter had arrived. And if it had arrived, she wanted to know if it had made any difference.



I told her how much I appreciated her assistance and intervention. I also told her that if it had not been for her remembering those important points from years before, I was quite sure the “robbery” would have been much worse. Over the years, I have often wondered whether Judge Troland remembered me and our involvement in that juvenile court case. And, if he did, how much influence did it have on his decision?

### The “Mother Goose” Incident

In May 1964, shortly after I returned to work after the firing, “Mother Goose” and censorship became a thorny problem. Concerns that many black people had with “Mother Goose” were in the pages of *Jet* magazine and the *New York Times*. The issue of censorship, when the problem was initially presented to me, never entered my mind. A parent informed me that her young daughter had borrowed a book from the children’s library. The book, *Mother Goose Rhymes*, contained rhymes with verses such as, “Eena, Meena, Minah, Mo, catch a nigger by the toe.” The rhymes also contained other verses such as, “Ten Little Niggers,” instead of “Ten Little Indians,” which was horrible enough. I referred the parent to our education chair, Mrs. Constance Harrison. Harrison met with the parents and their daughter and discussed the book and its value to young society. When the branch next met, Harrison reported on the book. The disturbing words notwithstanding, I don’t think anyone broached the subject of censorship during the ensuing deliberations, which ultimately resulted in a statement for the media. The statement, drafted by our board, condemned the rhymes, labeling them as “insulting, degrading, offensive, and just plain passe, and not in keeping with the times.”

Contrary to news reports, we never called for the removal of the book from the library. I said that children shouldn’t be exposed to such literature. What I think happened was that when reporters contacted the library concerning the book, the library directors panicked. Someone reported that Olive Prentis, acting librarian, unaware of the contents of the book, said, “Now that I know, I will do something about it.” It was my understanding that Mildred Needham, children’s librarian, for whatever reason, brought the book to the attention of library director, Frederick W. Edgerton. It was Edgerton who condemned the book and ordered the offensive verses to be removed. Later, finding other offensive verses, Prentis said that she personally removed them as well.

Because of the widespread news of the “Mother Goose” incident, I received mail from those who objected to censoring books. In particular, I received a long letter from a Mrs. Mills of either Stamford or Norwalk. She was quite nice in explaining the consequences of censorship. I had no quarrel with her or any others who felt obligated to write me. I wholeheartedly agreed with their positions on censorship. *Mother Goose Rhymes* was a 1917 edition. It was something that came along, and we spoke out on it. As I noted, the only thing we did was to release a statement to the media. That statement took on a life of its own, but even though I considered censorship an important issue, I wasn’t going to let it overwhelm our primary function. In other words, I wasn’t going to let the issue blind us to our immediate racial problems. We still had a lot of work to do.

### Coming Through With Flying Colors

Later in 1964, I was approached by Joe Sullivan to attend a meeting at the Chamber of Commerce on Huntington Street. My priority was better employment opportunities, and I

could see the possibility of gaining something by meeting with chamber officials. I can't recall any others attending the initial meeting except Marshall Ginther, Joe Sullivan, L. Reginald Eccleston, Jr., and Dr. Dorothy Leib. Dr. Leib was chagrined when told by Ginther that the meeting was private. She wanted to stay but left reluctantly. I think she was embarrassed by the state of affairs.

I didn't know Eccleston was invited until he told me the day before the meeting. I had an eerie feeling when he told me he was invited because I knew Sullivan and Eccleston had been childhood school pals. My fears became real when Sullivan told me something to the effect that I was blowing things—employment and such—out of proportion. Eccleston, however, calmed my fears and came through with flying colors. I was to remind Eccleston of that meeting many times over the subsequent years. He interrupted Sullivan saying, "No, no, Joe, he's speaking the truth. I was turned down for a job in the city's recreation department. You know who turned me down, too," Eccleston said boldly. "As a result," Eccleston informed Sullivan, "I had to go to Georgia to get a job in a school system." I certainly appreciated Eccleston's remarks, I definitely had been on edge when he told me that he would be at the meeting with his boyhood schoolmate.

### **Vandalism at Shiloh**

The price of NAACP activism on the local level was losing my job, being threatened with bodily harm, and suffering through political tricks. It also meant being part of a church power struggle that, I believe, led to deliberate vandalism at our beloved meeting place, Shiloh Baptist Church.

Of all the places we met, Shiloh was a home for us. Prior to the early 1960s, the New London branch, with no permanent headquarters, met at either the YWCA or the YMCA. Shiloh Baptist Church, which purchased the County Jail on Franklin Street and remodeled it for its sanctuary in 1959, extended a hand and invited the NAACP to hold meetings at the church. This bond lasted over a number of years, and although the NAACP met at various other churches and institutions, Shiloh Baptist Church was referred to as our main headquarters.

In our quest for equality, we conducted voter registration drives, voter education drives, membership drives, and various other activities. It was little wonder that, in late 1964 when Shiloh Baptist was vandalized, people pointed their fingers at the NAACP. Many were genuinely convinced that the vandalism was racially motivated. I never gave much thought to that possibility. I felt sure the vandal wanted it believed that the foul deed was a racial matter. But my theory was that when the Reverend Garvin, after years as the church's pastor, indicated his desire to retire, the announcement triggered an internal power struggle. This internal strife was never really publicized. And the sabotage did not cause a truce between the warring factions. In fact the conflict intensified. The New London NAACP took a neutral stand. The National NAACP did not.

Being uninformed, some New York officials jumped into the matter with a vengeance. They wasted no time contacting me about the internal problems. They told me, "We have requested the FBI investigate the vandalism at Shiloh Baptist Church. We trust that you will give the FBI your fullest co-operation in the matter." I told the caller there was a power struggle within the church, and furthermore, there was nothing that



indicated it was of a racial matter. I also told him that I had talked with the pastor of the church. The pastor had convinced me the matter wasn't racial in nature. I told the caller, "I think Reverend Garvin knows more than I do about the matter, and he certainly knows more than you do, seeing that you're in New York." The caller insisted the vandalism was racial and that the FBI would conduct its investigation. At that point I literally slammed the phone down. I was disgusted.

Whatever had been done, it was too late for us to undo. I made a few calls to members closely associated with the church. Factions on both sides of the struggle indicated it was "an inside job." As before, I didn't get the feeling our activities led to the vandalism, and those members I had talked to reinforced my feelings. Some of the people I talked to were sure it was a certain person of their group who had committed the "satanic" deed. I admit that cowardice overcame me. I wanted to hide and avoid becoming involved in the affairs of the church, particularly with this problem. I donned my hat and coat and prepared for the disappearing act.

Then, before I could leave the house, the telephone rang. The caller, a young woman, gave me hell. She told me that she was a representative of NERV (New England Regional Volunteers), and we didn't know what we were doing. She told me the people of New London had not been cooperative and she demanded to meet with me concerning the vandalism. I told her all leads pointed to the church's internal struggle. But she didn't want to hear anything about my theory. "This is a racial thing," she told me, "And we've just got this weekend to get to the bottom of it." The young lady tried to set up an appointment with me. I begged off, telling her I had an urgent appointment out of town. I told her the members of the group, made up of high school and college students, were welcome to talk to anyone they could find, and report their findings to the national office. I also repeated that I was confident they would find nothing racial about the vandalism. She said I had the wrong attitude and that she was going to report me to the national office. Before leaving town, I had not planned to get an afternoon paper, but the young lady kept me on the phone until the paper came out. I picked up a copy of *The Day*. There, on page two, was the bold headline, "NATIONAL NAACP ASKS PROBE OF SHILOH."

"Ridiculous," I thought to myself as I headed my automobile to New York City. Then, after returning to New London that Sunday evening, I made calls asking the outcome of NERV's investigation. "They're all gone back now," one of the board members told me. According to reports in the local paper, the group left town without finding anything. But they said they would return to continue their investigation. In the long run, however, that was the last time I heard anything about NERV. Whether they disbanded or not, I don't know. But I never heard of the organization again.

As far as the vandals at Shiloh were concerned, nothing was ever discovered that led to a suspect. The local police investigated, but the FBI never entered the case. I assume the FBI had heard Reverend Garvin's comments concerning the vandalism, "There is no need for an outside investigation. The local enforcement body is making progress. It doesn't make sense to just come in here without consulting the local people." He added to his statement, "This is not a race issue," he said.

Whether it was racially connected or not, the case of the Shiloh Baptist Church vandalism went into the records as "UNRESOLVED." Even without the pastor's words,

it would have been difficult to think otherwise. The vandalism was amateurish at best. If a bomb had been placed in the building with the intent to destroy it, my suspicions would certainly have been different. But the vandal went into the basement and caused some damage, then went into the kitchen and caused some damage. The reports were that losses were in the \$7,500 range. I personally think the estimate a little high.

With the police washing out their investigation, some of Shiloh's membership could sleep well again. If it were found out who was behind the vandalism, it would have proven embarrassing to Shiloh and the majority of its membership. Many members were just as happy the culprit wasn't found. I have my suspicions about who the vandal was, and if he doesn't tell, I certainly won't. The biggest danger was that when the National NAACP gave the vandalism so much publicity it could have given racists an idea not previously in their plans. They could become copycats. Though another way of thinking about it was that the headlines could actually cause them to leave our headquarters alone. There have always been two views in our community on that subject. But in any event, the racists never bothered the church. The church expanded and still is flourishing.

While the church was being repaired, we met at many other places. We held board meetings in the homes of members. But the branch meetings were different. Sometimes we met in churches, at the YWCA, YMCA, and on at least two occasions, at the Mohican Hotel in its Florentine Room. Though we were never denied a place to meet, we found the old saying never more true, "There's no place like home." We missed Shiloh greatly and moving back was more than a pleasure.

### **First Attempt of the Speakers Bureau**

Shortly before I took office in 1963, I asked for volunteers to become part of a Speakers Bureau. Our first engagement was at the request of Leonard Goldstein, rabbi of Congregation Beth El. I remember how frightened I was anticipating our first attempt to influence an audience. None of the speakers knew what the others would be saying, and it nearly turned into a disaster. I spoke on the goals of the organization, which I felt proper under the circumstances. In speaking about the goals, I emphasized to the audience that we needed all the help we could get. I wasn't just saying that to get members, but to get members who would get out in the trenches and work. I admitted there were dangers to being outspoken on the issue of racism, but made it clear that someone had to be bold enough to bring the problems to the attention of the public.

I thought the speech went over quite well, even though I stumbled through it a bit. To me, this short speech seemed like hours, and I was glad to be done. Another panelist then followed me, and during his presentation, I felt as if I wanted to disappear. I believe that Jacqueline Dell, another panelist, felt the same way I did. The person speaking started out nicely but somehow got off his main topic. He began to talk about his family, and how he felt about the dangers involved in NAACP work. I didn't know what our speaker was leading up to until he said, "If there's a choice between my family and others getting hurt, I'm sorry for the others, but my family comes first."

I had seen people brutally beaten with sticks and clubs, chased by mobs, and humiliated in one fashion or another to win our freedom, and here we were being made to sink low. I turned my head toward Mrs. Dell and realized she wished she wasn't in the

building. I had an awful feeling in the pit of my stomach, but being where we were, I had no choice except to stay. Dell and I talked about that episode for weeks. Although I have never quite lived it down, we determined that we would not be daunted in our efforts.

### **Black Muslims in New London**

The era of civil rights also brought about the emergence of the Nation of Islam. Eventually, their ideas found their way to the streets of New London. In 1959, Louis Lomax, a black reporter, asked national newscaster Mike Wallace, if he thought the New York affiliate they worked for might be interested in a story on the Nation of Islam, which had begun in the 1930s under the leadership of Master Wallace D. Fard Muhammad. After the founder's departure, Elijah Muhammad became the leader.

Most members of our organization knew about the Nation of Islam, dubbed Black Muslims by members of the media. While we adhered steadfastly to a policy of full integration, it was well known that the Nation of Islam believed in complete separation between blacks and whites. In 1963, the Nation of Islam made its initial appearance in the New London area. We were in the midst of redevelopment and other problems when the group, based in Hartford, motored here to sell their newspaper, *Muhammad Speaks*. Malcolm X established their mosque in Hartford in 1954 before his break with Elijah Muhammad. Malcolm's fire and leadership combined with Muhammad's message of self-help increased the membership in the Nation. They described themselves as being a part of the lost tribe of Shabazz, the original Asiatic black men.

In 1963, I saw the Muslims earlier in the day. In fact, I bought one of their newspapers downtown and returned home. I only looked at the headlines, not really having a chance to open it. All I knew pertaining to the Muslims was what I had read previously. One thing in particular had concerned the NAACP. The efforts of the Muslims, in 1961, had broken up a NAACP rally in Harlem. The rally was a commemoration of the 1954 Supreme Court decision outlawing segregation in public schools. I deliberately went downtown to get a good look at the men, but I didn't get a good look. All I could see was that the person who sold me the newspaper was black.

I noticed that the police were keeping a watchful eye on the Muslims. None of the young men was dressed shabbily. Each wore a suit and necktie. They wore no hats, and their hair was close cut. From the way they presented themselves, it was hard to believe the stories I read about them. The appearance of the Muslims in New London caused a lot of concern among local residents. The concerns were not limited to a single racial group, and the Muslims didn't care who bought their newspapers. If an automobile stopped for a traffic light, or a stop sign, a Muslim would be in the street trying to make a sale. Most of the time, and I don't know whether it was fear or not, someone in the car would buy a paper. I believe the word had spread, and people as curious as I was came out just to see them. I returned home and reread the literature the National NAACP had sent. The National Office was quite concerned about the Muslims.

It was a Saturday morning. After reading the literature from the National Office, I opened the Muslim's newspaper to see what its contents were. I had hardly opened it when the telephone rang. It was someone I did not want to talk to and I indicated as much. The caller was a reporter from *The Day*. He wanted a story on the Muslims, but I

did not want to give it to him for fear of creating a black versus black confrontation. The reporter kept prodding me to speak on the subject. After some moments, I decided to speak. I wasn't sure it was proper to do, but I repeated some things my constituents had said. We would probably have no contact with the Muslims. They probably didn't want any contact with us either. But I was quick to stress that the Muslims had a lot of good points and that the average black would probably agree with those points. However, one of the ideas that I didn't agree with personally was that the Muslims preached the doctrine of a separate state in this country for black people.

Something else I told him was that Muslims taught hatred for whites. I had a good reason for telling him that because some whites had died in an effort to aid our cause. I also said that the newspapers, especially the white ones, might have been unfair in reporting some of the violence attributed to the Muslims. I also noted that the Muslims were trying to teach self worth and self respect among blacks.

The reporter told me that the Muslims had tendencies toward violence. Of course, I had read about some of the violence myself. But I had not yet read where the Muslims condoned violence. I had read of incidents of violence, but not where they were unilaterally condoning it. I did not want to be caught in a bind, so I answered the reporter's statement this way, "I don't know whether they condone violence or not." For example, the NAACP never supported the Martin Luther King, Jr., doctrine of turning the other cheek, but that "doesn't mean that the NAACP has tendencies of violence. We have always advocated self defense, and if we are attacked, we will fight back." At the time I was talking to the reporter, I fingered the Muslim statement the National Office had sent to me. I had no intentions of repeating the statement because, for one, I didn't like parts of it. But as the reporter kept pushing for more on the subject, I decided to read what the National Office had to say. I made it clear to the reporter that although the statement didn't mention the Muslims by name, I knew parts of it pertained to them. I explained to the reporter it was a general position statement. Then, I read this to him:

*Some of these groups, in their public utterances, frequently make bitter anti-white and anti-Semitic statements while advocating racial superiority. They caustically criticize and oppose individuals and organizations, including the churches, which for years have worked to improve race relations through use of legislative, constitutional, legal and social action techniques, operating within the framework of federal and state laws.*

*We stand unalterably opposed to all separatist programs, whether advocated by southern segregationists or espoused by nonwhite racist organizations. Those actions [the statement made clear] often inspire hate, discord, and confusion among blacks who, because of their understandable bitterness and disappointment at the slow progress of integration in some areas of life in America, fall easy prey to the palliatives offered by these organizations.*

The material I was reading from went on to say:

*Many of these activities and teachings of the separatists are not only inconsistent with the aims and philosophy of the NAACP, but confuse*

*their programs and the legitimate, social and economic programs of the newly-emerging African nations.*

*The NAACP supports the emergence of African nations, but the solutions to problems of minority groups in the United States must be utilized through the laws and the processes guaranteed under the Constitution. While we will defend the right of any individual, or group of individuals, to the equal protection of the laws of the United States, we cannot condone or lend support to the action and/or utterances of inharmonious and hate-inspiring groups whose programs are contrary to all NAACP stands for and believes in.*

The statement ended by saying that people who are concerned about the rise of such organizations, and who decry their activities, should realize that the accelerated pace by black people towards equal rights will make it difficult for them to organize and flourish.

Prior to the Muslim entrance into New London, we conducted a program about civil rights in Norwich. Though the black separatist movement had entered New London, the most powerful organ of civil rights protest was still the NAACP. The purpose of the program was to increase awareness for the public and the local NAACP branch about these groups. We wanted to get out as much material as we could to the general public on what we knew. (Although none of us knew very much since groups like the Nation of Islam were usually concentrated in the larger cities such as Hartford and New Haven.) As I understood it, those cities had enough supporters to have mosques. At the time, in 1963, while there were Muslims in New London, from my observations, they were very few. In Norwich, on Thames Street, the Muslims opened a restaurant. Later, they opened a restaurant in New London. I was acquainted with some of them, and from my personal observation, they didn't seem to be organized; they basically kept to themselves and maintained a low profile.

As I was preparing to leave the NAACP presidency at the end of 1968, I realized that the Muslims had been noticing me when one of them approached me to say there was a group willing to pay me if I remained in office. I honestly appreciated the offer, but I had to decline.

Years later, the Muslims in the area increased their numbers and were organized well enough to establish a mosque in New London. Prior to that, they traveled to other cities where they had their religious functions.

# SEVEN

## The Fight to End Employment Discrimination

*We were flexing our muscles now.  
We were ready to do battle with the giant.*

We decided to tackle the largest employer in the area early in the summer of 1963. This was in the midst of discussions and debates about housing and other issues. The State of Connecticut had in place a Fair Employment Practices Act. However, we also needed federal legislation to break the cycle where blacks and other minorities were usually the last hired, and the first fired. I knew about this practice from personal experience because I had worked at EB as a painter in the 1940s. I had also worked in the rivet gang. In the '40s, during the winter months, when I was in school, I worked part time. And during the summer, when there was no school, I worked full time. (But I was not any different than any of the other blacks.)

When the time came, I was in the first group to be laid off, and shortly after I found myself drafted into the Navy. The Navy sent me to Bainbridge, Maryland, to cooks and bakers school to become a steward, a humiliating experience. But, even though I was trained as a steward, I escaped steward's duties for a long while. At the Naval Air Station (Floyd Bennett Field) in Brooklyn, I was a master-at-arms. When discharged I applied at EB.

Although I made many trips to EB, I was not rehired. Among other places, I also went to Pfizer's. The results were the same. It was, however, mainly "The Boat Company" where I sought employment. I spoke with a longtime white employee of EB who told me he remembered the days when EB was turning away many black job seekers. He said, "They acted like those people didn't have to eat." I was one of those people he was speaking of. I was one of the many blacks going into the military only to return to the area to nothing and no promise of anything. In the 1950s, and early 1960s, when things started to look promising at EB, there was nothing to say that a black person was secure there. With strike threats and layoff threats hanging over the workers' heads, it was a mixed-bag for both black and white workers, but whites would fare better if the threats turned into reality. In 1961, and 1962, NAACP job complaints were a mixture of successes and failures. All were from individuals who were turned down for employment, except one. We did have some luck, even though our inexperience showed. And when we failed to successfully aid an individual, it hurt. One individual's complaint, in particular, propelled our campaign against EB. I remember, sometime during our early involvement with EB, Jane Torrey telling me, "You sure tackled a big one this time." I felt we had no other choice.

It was the summer of 1963 when the New London branch of the NAACP was to declare an all-out war against the company. We received a complaint from Samuel Jones. Mr. Jones, a black minister, was also a burner at the plant. He was also the assistant

pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church in New London. Mr. Jones had been recruited in Baltimore by EB. In the Baltimore recruitment office, according to his complaint, he was told among other things, that if accepted by EB, following a thirty-day probationary period he would be promoted.

When the probationary period was up, and after waiting longer than the thirty days, Jones asked for the promised promotion. Jones's foreman allegedly told him, "I haven't paid too much attention to your work, but I will do that for the next thirty days." Jones said that he worked another week. Then, he thought about the initial promise. Why should he work an additional thirty days for something promised after the first thirty? He went once again and asked his foreman for the raise. He was again denied the promotion. But, besides the promotion denial, he was given other shocking information that troubled him greatly. According to Jones, his foreman told him he was being transferred to another shift. Jones told us that he was devastated by that turn of events. Yet he knew that whether he liked it or not, he had no choice but to accept the transfer. At this point, being transferred to another shift became a bone of contention.

Jones told us that from the start he had specifically asked about working the same shift and had been told that his shift would be permanent. And though he didn't like it, he accepted the new shift. But he did not accept being denied a promotion. He put the question of a promotion to his new shift foreman, who, he told us, was not receptive. Jones also said the foreman told him that he didn't know of any probationary promise. Soon after Jones was put on the new shift, warning slips began to accumulate for rules infractions. According to the company, each slip was submitted to the union for protest. It isn't clear what the union did to aid Jones, but the warning slips were upheld. Having no other choice, he came to the NAACP seeking help.

We took his signed statement and forwarded it to the Connecticut Civil Rights Commission. The commission's procedures were slow. Although we had received the complaint in July and had immediately passed it on to the commission, it wasn't until September 3, two months later, that a field representative investigated the complaint. The field man talked to EB officials. Then, four days later, Mr. Jones was fired. The company accused him of "sleeping on the job." Reverend A.A. Garvin intervened on his behalf. The Civil Rights Commission demanded answers from EB. But Jones seemed doomed. After numerous phone calls, and two or three registered letters, EB responded—a response that was of no help to Samuel Jones.

A few days after the Samuel Jones incident, EB fired George Redding, another black worker. Redding had been a welder at the plant. The company said he was dismissed for "willful misconduct" and for being "absent without an excuse." Mr. Redding was actually in the hospital with chronic appendicitis. His case should have been an easy one, but Mr. Redding had grown tired of EB. He would have been content to draw unemployment compensation while seeking other employment, but when he filed for compensation, EB contested it. Redding came to us for advice. I recommended he appeal for a hearing before the Unemployment Compensation Board. I also told him to file a complaint. We forwarded the complaint to the Civil Rights Commission. Redding represented himself at the compensation hearing. EB sent a Mr. Sharp to represent its interests. The compensation board ruled that, "Illness does not constitute willful misconduct." Redding had won his battle for unemployment benefits.

With the favorable ruling to back its claim, the Civil Rights Commission pressed for Redding to be reinstated. The company did decide to take Redding back, but there was a catch. They did not want him back as a welder; they wanted to put him in another department, which would mean he would lose his seniority. Redding balked at the offer and refused to transfer. He never returned to the company.

Each one of these incidents took place after representatives of the union went to Washington. And each firing took place after a field representative of the Civil Rights Commission went to EB. The union men went in June of 1963, and told President John F. Kennedy, "There is no discrimination at EB." The EB officials were John Weimer, president of the Metal Trades Council, John H. Lovgren and James Gifford, representing the Pipefitters, and Quentin Desimone, representing the Clerical Workers Unions. Lowgren told President Kennedy that the unions at EB had no discrimination problems. "Due to the efforts of both Negro and white workers at EB, the proof of our efforts will be topped off by a double launching next Saturday," he said with confidence.

It was after we had read newspaper accounts of the White House meeting that we knew something had to be done. The union officials had gone to Washington and told administration officials, "General Dynamics/Electric Boat has no discrimination problems." Such statements were made at the time the NAACP and labor representatives were preparing for the massive march on Washington, a march billed as a march for "Jobs and Freedom." It was ironic that we were reading a statement saying, "All's well at EB," when black workers in the yard were saying, "All's not well." And blacks had been saying that for a long time. Not only blacks within the yard, but also blacks who had been seeking employment and were turned down.

The all-white union delegation told President Kennedy that discrimination did not exist at EB. Reading their statement was a bitter pill to swallow, and my first thoughts were to make them eat their words. At that time, we had heard about Samuel Jones and his problems at the company, but he had not yet presented them to us. We had a number of other complaints of discrimination on file with the commission, but they were moving slowly. Although we still filed with the commission, we knew something of a different nature would have to be done. What we decided to do was to change our procedures, then take steps to try to implement them.

The first change came near the end of June 1963. I gave Clarence Faulk free rein to organize black workers and union officials. There were some negative reactions from union officials, but that was their problem. We were not going to be distracted. On July 2nd, after some hard-line, pointed discussions, our efforts bore fruit, resulting in a meeting between us, the unions, and the black workers. As a consequence of the meeting, a bi-racial committee was formed at EB. Sometime in the mid 1980s, *The Day* quoted Henry Story as saying that Reverend J. Sidney Wilson was responsible for blacks being hired at EB. But Henry Story was wrong if he said that. NAACP workers were responsible for blacks being hired. And, as I have said, the bi-racial committee was our idea, and its functions were internal. When I approached Story about the quote, he claimed he had never made it.

The following text of a story appearing in *The Day*, July 3, 1963, makes the role of the New London Chapter of the NAACP quite clear:



*EB Unions, Negroes Form Joint Group*

*A committee composed of six union officials and six Negroes is being organized to investigate alleged discrimination in job classification and promotion at General Dynamics/Electric Boat. The committee grew out of a meeting last night at the Mohican Hotel between representatives of the Metal Trades Council of New London County, bargaining agent for shipyard workers, and 13 Negroes, most of them EB workers. The New London Chapter of the NAACP was also represented. The joint meeting between the Negroes, led by Rev. J. Sidney Wilson, a rigger at EB who also is an assistant minister at Shiloh Baptist Church in New London, and the MTC, was described as "friendly" by a person attending.*

*Mr. Wilson, representing the workers, had requested the meeting following publication of a statement recently by John Weimer, president of the MTC, that discrimination does not exist at the submarine shipyard.*

*Weimer said his statements were in regard to the MTC. Mr. Wilson and Negro workers at EB questioned Weimer's statement. He said Negroes feel many of the trades are top-heavy with Negro workers. "They hold the menial jobs. Jobs that many white workers won't take," Mr. Wilson said. "We feel Negroes are frozen in these jobs [welding, chipping, grinding and lagging] and can't get promoted."*

*The minister-rigger also felt there are too few Negro supervisors at the shipyard. He told the joint meeting this. He estimated there are only four Negro supervisors in the yard. No date has been set for another meeting at which members on the discrimination committee will be chosen. It was pointed out during the discussion last night that the union does not have jurisdiction over promotion and hiring of supervisory personnel. Union officers said often, "they can only pursue the problem through normal grievance channels." Six blacks were selected for the committee along with six union officials. Three black members of the committee were also members of the NAACP. They were Richard Johnson, Wilson and McKinley Winston. Besides the union, Electric Boat also had representatives from its Industrial Relations Department.*

The committee drew up bylaws stating it would handle internal problems. But in the event it was unable to solve a particular problem, it didn't preclude a complainant from seeking outside assistance. That was included so anyone not satisfied with results wouldn't be prevented from asking for outside help. The clause was at the insistence of the NAACP. Thus began a mechanism sanctioned by us, but independent in running its own operation. What the committee did was to take some of the pressures off us. That was one of the reasons we initiated the idea of an EB joint committee. It gave us more time to work with those seeking employment at the company as well as those who were dismissed and thought their dismissals discriminatory.

It was an ideal situation from our standpoint. And the publicity about the formation of the committee didn't hurt either. Samuel Jones had used union procedures, and failing,

had come to the NAACP. Jones's complaint was then followed by George Redding's complaint. In each of the complaints, we routinely filed with the Civil Rights Commission. Those two complaints, in July and August respectively, were designed as an experiment to alter practices used by the NAACP in the past, practices that had not worked. I believed that changes had to take place, and with the firing of Samuel Jones on Sept. 13th, we tried to pressure the commission. We felt we had been used, the commission had been used, and Mr. Jones had been used. The commission needed proof that Jones had been fired for filing the complaint, but there was no way, given the time frame and the atmosphere, they could get that proof. I might add that Reverend Wilson and the yard's bi-racial group could have taken on the Jones case, but they chose not to get involved.

In the end, Samuel Jones turned out to be the proverbial "sacrificial lamb." The commission went through the motions of investigating. We were doing a lot of talking, but in effect, we were also going through the motions. We held meetings on the subject, trying to find solutions to make a break-through. But we were banging our heads against a brick wall. It was discouraging to be in this position. Something had to give before we all went crazy, including me. Then, as a last resort, we sent a request to EB for discussions on Jones and others.

It was November, and we wanted the discussions to take place then. We were in a hurry now that the ice had been broken, and we had acquired enough nerve to want to meet the company officials face to face. We were flexing our muscles now. We were ready to do battle with the giant. Although I personally didn't expect EB even to acknowledge our request, some of the black workers were urging us on. I think they knew we were their last hope. But while we talked big, we were just amateurs feeling our way. I knew the commission had been trying for months to get a meeting with the company, which is why I had little hope they would meet with us. Yet, although it took a month, the company finally responded to our request. They said they would meet with us. But they also included the union. I wasn't enthused by the prospect of union participation, but even with the union sitting, it would mean face to face contact with the company. We were, during this time, sending duplicates of the Jones and Redding complaints to our national office, asking Herbert Hill, NAACP national labor secretary, to come to New London. We held out hope that he would come here to sit in on our talks with EB and the union. The labor secretary, however, informed us that he would be unavailable; he added that he would be taking action on the national level but didn't specify what that action would be. I guess I was the most disappointed of all when I got the word that Hill would not be among us. I thought that perhaps he would at least send a representative. Nevertheless, with the knowledge that we would have to go it alone, we geared ourselves for the important meeting of the minds.

Suddenly, the date of the meeting was upon us. On Tuesday, December 17, 1963, Clarence Faulk, Peter Seng, and I, representing the New London NAACP, and Reverend Joseph Schneiders, president of the Norwich branch, met with nearly twenty EB and various union representatives. It was a serious and memorable occasion, although I don't think it was viewed that way by a number of union officials. Many seemed to have a cavalier attitude in their approach to us. Among those union officials meeting with us that day were Quentin De Simone, Local 106; H. Doyle, Local 493; John Lovgren, Local 620; Louis Gambro, Local 364; Paul Rudolph, Local 261; Roger Dawley, Local 1302; Weston Capen, Local 614; Terry Hogan, Local 238; W. Shanly (acting recording secretary); and

O.K. Davis, Sr., of Local 1871. There were also union representatives from Locals 469 and 1503. Some of the EB officials were Joseph Tracey, Edward Schneider, Hubert N. Dempsey, and Charles N. Farrell.

A number of times, we attempted to introduce the Jones and Redding issues only to find the company representatives beat back our initiatives. They had no intention of discussing the cases. We were rebuffed in our efforts to get our points across. They wanted something from us but wouldn't discuss that most pressing matter; we, in turn, refused to do what they wanted. The company officials didn't even try to bargain with us. What they wanted was for us to supply them with names of black employees who had complained to us about discriminatory practices within the company. Not referring to Samuel Jones by name in my reply, I told the officials we couldn't give those names because, "We wouldn't want those complaining employees to get caught sleeping on the job."

In retrospect, we were dumb negotiators, and the EB officials were more so. If those officials had been smart—and if they had any foresight at all as to the way the civil rights movement was going—they would have resolved the Jones and Redding issue then and there. They would have taken a position of compromise. They would have offered something in order that issues could have been resolved. If they had done that, it would have shown good faith to us. We, in turn might have been amenable to some type of reciprocation. But in the end, EB officials offered us nothing. We possibly could have been at fault, being novices in the attempt. But that doesn't mean we were not courageous in our attempt. Of the twenty company and union representatives, some lawyers were among them. We were just ordinary laymen going up against a powerful and experienced structure.

We submitted a seven-point proposal to the company, and a nine-point proposal to the union, and although we didn't know it at the time, things were going to turn in our favor. With the proposal before both union and company, it became clear that no practical purpose could be served through other discussions. We therefore walked out of the meeting. It was all trial and error from then on. At about the same time, our communications to Herbert Hill caused him to act. The *Hartford Courant*, of Friday, December 20, 1963, carried the news:

*Formal Racial Charges To Be Filed Against EB.*

*Groton [Special]-National NAACP headquarters plan to file formal charges of discrimination in the hiring and treatment of workers at Electric Boat/General Dynamics with the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunities.*

Officials in New York City Thursday said they had been investigating the charges closely and had "good reason" to believe EB was definitely involved in discriminatory practices and therefore violating Executive Order 1092B concerning employment practices under Federal contracts. "We are now completing a rather lengthy investigation," officials said, "And we should have our formal report for the president's committee ready shortly."

The paper reported that "efforts Tuesday to discuss specific NAACP charges with local NAACP head Linwood Bland, Jr., were unsuccessful." I did tell the paper that, "EB officials were either unprepared or unwilling to discuss individual cases. They seemed to

think the meeting was held to discuss fair employment practices in general.” I was unwilling to identify publicly any of the individual complaints and told the paper that “I will not jeopardize the workers who have filed complaints and who are still employed.” We filed five additional complaints that day against EB, with more to be filed in the future. In our opinion, the EB situation was one of serious discrimination. Of the 17,000 employed at EB, about 500 were blacks. We had enough complaints filed to make anyone’s head swim. The article appeared on Thursday and I had alerted the national NAACP early the previous summer. The local had been in close contact with the national NAACP during the entire ordeal. I told them that “if we can’t get anywhere with the EB officials directly, there are many other ways to skin the cat.”

The Metal Trades Council reported that they were already complying with a nine-point proposal we had advanced to help control discriminatory practices. My reply was, “they must have started today. The racial committee formed by the union was last summer.” I told the paper that EB “had done absolutely nothing as far as I know. Formation of the committee has not stopped complaints from being filed with our group. Most were filed with us after the committee was formed.”

The release coming from the national was a shot in the arm for us. We targeted EB and the union because we didn’t want them to become complacent, though other local companies were also targeted. But EB was special. It was the area’s largest employer. We therefore mounted an on-going publicity campaign against EB and pulled no punches. At one of our NAACP branch meetings, a former local NAACP official, an employee of EB, rose and objected to our publicity campaign against the company. He began with these words, “You can be sued you know,” pointing at me. I politely told him that, “We will just have to take that chance.” His words didn’t carry too much weight with me, even though he was a charter member of the branch and also a member of my family. I had heard similar words before from blacks working at other companies. Although that was the first from an EB employee, others had complained when we talked about action involving their employers. EB stood steadfast against our publicity campaign.

Although we really barraged them through the news media, we had no idea what would happen. But between our pressure and publicity from the national, things were happening. I received a call one evening that took me by surprise. The caller had more than pleasant news. He wanted to meet with me, and as he put it, “a small number of others interested in EB.” The first person I called was Arthur Greene. Mr. Greene was one of the state civil rights investigators. He was among those who had visited EB to process complaints from black workers. I knew he was an interested person. Next, I called Clarence Faulk, McKinley Winston, and Richard Johnson.

We met at my house for an unpublicized meeting with Norman Landry. Landry presented his credentials to show that he was an employee of the Defense Department. He told us, “I was sent here from Newport News to try to help out. The information I’m going to share with you is privileged, and I hope you act accordingly.” Landry had been in the area about a week, and during that time, he had been in and out of EB numerous times. We learned that he had opened the lines of communications between EB and the local branch. Landry cautioned, “It won’t be easy. You’ll still have a job on your hands, but the door is opened now. The company will be getting in touch with you.”

The weight of the struggle with EB had fallen from Arthur Greene's shoulders. You could see the relief that overcame him. Later, during a break in Landry's presentation, he told Landry how he had been so frustrated by EB's tactics. And he told Landry how, even if discrimination is proved, little can be done. Greene said the field representatives, the ones who did the footwork and gathered the evidence, could recommend disciplinary actions. But he said, in the case of large defense conglomerates, nothing would happen. Landry told Greene he appreciated the position of the Civil Rights Commission and was quite candid when he took the time to explain the federal government's position to Greene: "I know you have your hands tied, but we happen to hold the purse strings. But, I don't want anyone in this room to think we are going to cut off submarine building. We most certainly have the authority to recommend it. But it never will be implemented." I don't think anyone, even with the wildest imagination, would expect a fund to be cut off. And for that matter, no one in his right mind would want that to happen. But at least the threat of a cut off was a weapon. And even though a company knew it would never happen, few would want to be threatened by a discontinuation of funds.

Landry listened to views, and then continued his presentation. He explained that "We have other means at our disposal, and EB would like it if we didn't have to use them." He told us to use the bi-racial committee, which we had formed earlier, for internal problems at EB. In that way, we could work on the external problems regarding EB's hiring practices. Landry had read my mind about the committee handling problems internally. That was a job in itself. He did tell Richard Johnson and Winston, both on the bi-racial committee, that if they weren't able to solve a problem, they should go to the NAACP. "They know how to contact me." I smiled at Greene because his relief and mine were evident. Greene told me, "Linwood, you don't know how my hands have been tied by bureaucratic rules and regulations. It's up to you fellows now."

After Landry left the meeting, there was nothing but joy. We had finally obtained a most important lever, and we were anxious to use it. The first thing done was to solidify the bi-racial committee at EB. That committee was formed earlier at a meeting at the Mohican Hotel. After meeting with Landry, they acknowledged their primary function and resolved to carry it out. They also were aware of how many problems they faced, and the complexity of some of them. Being on the outside, we knew that we also had a multitude of problems, so we reminded the committee of their obligation to keep us informed.

We didn't care how small the matter was; we wanted to know because some of the problems were compounded by years of neglect. The first issue the bi-racial committee tackled was the lack of black union stewards. The committee said, "Their [black workers] security would be enhanced by having black stewards throughout the unions." The bi-racial committee members chose the potential stewards. I felt that was wrong. As far as I was concerned, that was favoritism. My thoughts were not so personal. I knew blacks were concentrated in certain trades. Had I been on the committee, those trades, top heavy with blacks, would have been my primary targets. I wanted the committee to review the qualifications of blacks in those trades. Then, after having done that, those eligible would be offered employment in other fields or trades. Between chippers and welders, there were many who had college backgrounds. My thought was that the college people were working below their levels. It was my preference to move those educationally qualified blacks out of menial jobs. The members of the committee, however, felt far differently. I don't believe they ever attempted to do that, or even thought of doing it.

They urged six blacks to file complaints with the NAACP, a maneuver that caught me completely off guard. I told one member, it was “uncalled for.” The complaint was general, and it was aimed at the Boilermakers Union, Local 614. This was one of the few times I felt like not following through. But pride, and whatever else it was, caused me to turn the complaint over to Arthur Greene for investigation. Greene went into EB and investigated the charges. The result was a victory for the black employees. There had been three vacancies for stewards. Blacks were allotted two of the spots. The most interesting part of it all was that none of the six complaining blacks was appointed. As I was to learn in the years that followed, the average black who filed a complaint was rarely considered for a job. The employer would do it another way. Depending on the case, the employer would rather hire, appoint, or transfer another black in response to the original complaint.

There was another curious sidelight to the complaint. It was interesting that the Boilermaker’s, Local 614, denied any such discrimination, but at the same time capitulated because of the complaints. Shortly after our meeting with Landry, we received a letter from EB. They had scheduled a meeting with us at a local inn. That was the second meeting with the company, and the first without union participation. That, of course, was the way I wanted it at the first meeting, but EB had chosen to include the unions. I had thought we could accomplish much more with fewer participants. The unions had no control over EB’s hiring practices. In fact, they had no control over anything. A person hired by the company had nothing to do with the union initially. EB could hire, or fire, anyone it saw fit, leaving the unions helpless. Only after a worker completed the probationary period, could he become a member of any EB union.

At this first meeting without union participation, we found the company took almost the same attitude that the union had displayed on December 17, 1963. All of the men who met with us, with the exception of one, denied there was any discrimination at the company. The lone exception, Robert Sutherland, had nothing to say one way or the other concerning the issue. From what I was told a few days later, Sutherland came to EB from Convair, a General Dynamics plant in California, just to listen. I don’t know how true that was, but I do know he was silent on the topic of discrimination. Other participants from the company were Dietrich C. Wilkins, Frederick Whitehouse, and Robert O. Brown. Brown was designated to be our contact man. I didn’t realize how important it was at the time, but Mr. Brown turned out to be an ideal contact. I think he was soon to learn that I was interested in all aspects of employment at EB.

Meeting one evening at Lighthouse Inn, a well-known establishment, I brought up the possibility of hiring women in the trades. It being one of those things you didn’t need a crystal ball to see, I was still surprised to hear some of the comments. Their main objection concerned restrooms. One official said, “We would have to build separate toilet facilities.” It would have been humorous—and I must admit I had to laugh—but those officials were serious. I had no intention of prolonging the negative discussion but couldn’t help mentioning that women worked in the trades at the company during World War II. What I didn’t tell them was that Congress was again debating national rights concerns, and was about to amend the Civil Rights Act to include women. Only a few months later, the congressional amendment passed.

At another meeting with EB officials, this time at another well-known establishment, the Norwich Inn, I brought up clerical employment standards for discussion. We had no

local or national precedents set. It could have been one of those trial and error times, but it wasn't. Prior to going to the inn, I felt I had three aces in the hole and one showing. I had no doubts about winning on this particular issue. A few eyebrows were raised when I put the clerical standards topic on the table. I can't remember how I expected them to respond, but I was ready to do battle. Sutherland, Wilkins, and Robert Brown were in attendance for the company. Garfield Rucker, president of the Norwich NAACP branch, and Clarence Faulk, my vice-president and labor committee chairman and I represented the NAACP.

Blacks, mostly females, had contacted us because they were turned down for clerical work. Most clerical work required some typing skills, but blacks told us EB required them to do sixty words per minute. I thought that in the past beginning typists could type sixty words a minute; however, I had no way to prove that few persons would be called upon to type that fast. It seemed to me, there would have to be unusual circumstances for an individual to work so quickly, most likely being exceptions, not the rule. But more on those aces, and why I was so highly optimistic about winning. I had an edge. It was almost as though I had a royal straight flush when I forced the clerical issue upon them. It was like dealing from the bottom of the deck. But no one knew except me.

I had not told Faulk what happened three weeks earlier. I had called Washington, D.C. in an attempt to speak with Landry; however, I was told he was in the field. I explained to the person on the other end why I wanted to reach him. I was then connected to another office. I spoke with Walter Walley who promised he would look into the matter. The day before we met with the three EB officials, Walley called me. He told me I was on my own, and I definitely should bring the clerical matter up and, "Don't back down." That was the one thing he didn't have to tell me. I knew that if I put it on the table, there would be no backing down. And from my point of view, I would be dealing from the bottom. In fact, it was such a good deal, it was almost like cheating.

We could deal with the problem head on without having to get involved in case by case complaints by attacking on a "class action" basis. I presented the issue to EB officials that evening. I opened with, "We have not taken any individual written statements from the complaining parties, but if it's necessary, we will." Sutherland and Wilkins remained silent while Brown took issue with my presentation by arguing the merits of "sixty words per minute." He contended that "They have to be grade A to get those clerical jobs. Sixty words a minute is the standard at our company, and we can't accept anything less." There were a number of other points he came up with in defense of the standard. Even as he argued, however, I knew I had an extremely good to excellent chance of winning a concession.

I didn't know where support would be coming from, or from what direction, but the handwriting was on the wall that evening. I was confident as I tried to convince them without having a tangible foundation to stand on. But that's the way I had intended to do it. What I mean by not having a solid, tangible, foundation is, I didn't have anything in writing that would give specific details or guidelines. But I had let them know earlier in the evening that I was speaking to them on an over-all, general basis. I was prepared to talk all night, and into the next day if necessary. If D.C. Wilkins was tired of listening to me, or he knew something else, I will never know. But I was so relieved when he said abruptly, "Consider the typing standards lowered."

His concession was a major victory for us, and a major defeat for EB policies, which had been in effect until that evening. The following day I was on the telephone. The first person I called was the last woman I had talked to about clerical employment at EB, Shernell Knight. She told me she had applied, but had failed the test. She was turned down because she had just missed the sixty words. Many would have thought what I had just told her would make her happy. I certainly thought it would.

She had applied for clerical work two weeks prior to our meeting with the company. Some of the white clerical workers, a few who had been with the company for years, and some of the newer white arrivals, said what we had been saying about the standard long before the historic breakthrough, "The words per minute rule would have kept them out of EB also." So, in effect, Wilkins revealed the double standard used against blacks. The admission from white typists was direct, and graphically illustrated the problem. I had heard many times, "We had to be better. Not equal to whites, but better equipped."

It was very difficult for me to convince Shernell Knight to return to the company. Not that she wouldn't go back at a future date, but she said she would have to wait. I was shocked, and I pressed her for answers. I couldn't believe that was the same Ms. Knight that I had talked to two weeks earlier. She reiterated that "they're not going to hire me." She talked about going back at a later date. She kept repeating that she couldn't go back yet. Then I began to really press her for specifics. I wanted to know why? Ms. Knight told me that: "Miss \_\_\_\_\_ said I would have to wait six months before I can re-apply." I didn't like that reply at all. I told her to go back that day. Her answer was the same. She repeated what the woman had told her. Then I got pretty angry with her. I thought long and hard about Robert Brown's argument. I couldn't let her do that to me.

When I demanded she return to EB that day, she told me she couldn't go that day, but agreed to go back the next day. I told her to call me after she went and tell me what had happened. The young lady called the next day and said, "That lady that turned me down two weeks ago has really changed. She told me I still came up short on the typing test. But she also said that she would put me to work if she had to 'make a job for me.'" I asked Ms. Knight if anything was said about the six-month waiting period. "She didn't say anything, and neither did I," Miss Knight said. In telling me she had been hired, she did not know that we had scored a major coup. A giant obstacle had tumbled. We used to think, in terms of progress in inches and feet. A black, in the person of Shernell Knight, being hired, was more than inches and feet. Our efforts bore fruit, and the rewards were wonderful.

Many people employed through our efforts against EB in the 1960s are still there. Others left the mills from the surrounding area and business schools to find better employment at EB because of that eventful evening at Norwich Inn. I am not sure, and I don't have any way of finding out, but I'm certain Robert O. Brown began to see EB in a different light that evening. His argument at the Norwich Inn was very strong, although terribly incorrect. But I think if it wasn't for the time frame in which we were dealing, I feel certain his argument would have convinced the average person. But that was the mid-1960s, and the tide was changing rapidly.

Shernell Knight, with the possible exception of one incident early on in her employment, fared very well. That incident was racial in nature, and the aftermath was reminiscent of the episode that had happened to me three years earlier involving Reginald Eccleston, Chamber of



Commerce officials, and myself. As then, here again was the trick of trying to pose blacks against each other. This incident occurred in 1967 and involved officials of EB and a black EB female employee named Ann Smith. I had no idea she would be in attendance at a meeting at Lighthouse Inn. The meeting with the officials and their wives was insignificant as I viewed it, but the presence of Ms. Smith caused me anxiety.

For a long time I thought Ms. Smith's presence was just a coincidence. But remembering conversations that took place and what occurred at that meeting, I eventually determined that Ms. Smith was brought along for the purpose of opposing me. That was the first time Ms. Smith had ever attended a private gripe session between the two parties. It would be her last while I was NAACP president. It must be noted, beginning in 1966, with the participation of EB in our Youth Opportunity Day programs, Ms. Smith became a permanent EB representative. In any event, I had about the same feeling about Ms. Smith as I did about Eccleston before he spoke up. The only difference, as I recall, was I knew Eccleston would be in attendance. I knew nothing about Ms. Smith's attendance until she appeared that evening. It really would not have mattered to me if I hadn't planned to challenge EB that evening. But I wanted to hear how the officials would respond without the help of another black.

Ms. Smith objected to my mentioning the incident involving Shernell Knight. She told me, "Linwood, as many problems as you've got in redevelopment, and in other things like housing, you've got to bring up something like that." Well I took offense to her response. I could have cared less just how she felt. A racial problem within the gates of EB was very important to me. I could have readily understood it if one of the white employees had found the incident small and insignificant. But only the black invited guest seemed to find my comments distasteful.

I guess I did look like a troublemaker to some. Sometimes we would initiate an investigation on hearsay. The incident involved a conversation that had happened between Ms. Knight and a male employee. The conversation took place a short time after Ms. Knight was hired. She was asked to call another department for some documents. A male employee answered on the other end. While scanning files and talking to Knight at the same time, the man began inquiring about things that had nothing to do with the job. In response to something the man said, Ms. Knight said that she would rather live in Washington, D.C. To that the man was reported to have observed, "There's too many niggers in D.C." Well, Ms. Knight was taken aback, to say the least. She did not, however, give any indication that she was black to her conversant. Then, she in my view made some mistakes. She did not tell her superiors what had transpired during that phone conversation. Nor did she tell it to anyone else in authority. What she did was to tell the story to at least one person who saw that the NAACP was notified. I heard about it later.

When I called Ms. Knight, we went around and around. First, she pretended that the conversation had not taken place. But, I did know about it and then she didn't want me or anyone else to carry it any further. Ms Knight said that she would rather forget the incident. I had not called her to receive that news. She reconsidered her stand when I told her that I would personally go to EB and report the incident myself.

Ms. Knight never mentioned that incident to me again, nor did I ever again mention it to her. But I did get back a report of how she allegedly reported the incident to her

supervisor. Ms. Knight, according to my source, prefaced her remarks to the boss by saying, "There's a man in New London who's coming over here to raise hell if I don't tell you. Well I'm going to tell it to you, but I don't want to hear anything about it again."

I could understand her thinking, since no one wants to be seen on their job as a malcontent. I wanted her to tell it in the yard to some responsible person so that when I met with EB officials, it would be an area that would be explored. I wanted EB officials not only to respond, but also to realize that we had an excellent pipeline for information. Plus, if they did not already know, I wanted them to be aware of the remarks that had been made to Ms. Knight. As it turned out, they already knew about the incident. Robert O. Brown said, "He knows everything that goes on in the plant."

The incident was not small and insignificant to my way of thinking, and I let Ann Smith know it. If someone was so upset to have brought it out of the yard and reported it to me, then I felt that it should not have been covered up. My thought on the subject was, if you stop the "seemingly unimportant" little racial problems, maybe some of the larger problems can be prevented in the future. The fact that EB officials were aware of the incident, probably before I was, should have been warning enough. I told her, "We have a hard enough time getting Negroes in the company as it is. And when we do get them in, they might as well be happy while they're working there," I said. "No one has to listen to something such as that, especially when they don't want to."

That night, a stroke of luck made me a winner. The wife of one of EB's officials came to my aid. Her support was totally unexpected, but a very pleasant surprise. I could not, in my wildest dreams, have expected anyone at that meeting would take my side and defend my stand on the issue. At the meeting that evening were the wives of two officials. I can't recall which of the wives came to my aid, but she said, "I don't blame him for bringing it up. I certainly wouldn't want to work there under those conditions either." I have often wondered if the woman realized that she saved the day. I am not sure whether a hush fell over the table or not. The one thing that I am sure of is that, after the woman spoke, there was no comment from Ann Smith, or anyone else for that matter.

One thing that I learned early in my civil rights work was that whites would use black individuals to try to discredit other blacks. Sometimes that strategy worked and that was unfortunate. The two times I knew of it happening to me, the strategy of using black against black did not succeed. Thus, we were able to continue in our efforts to help blacks acquire and keep well paying jobs.

I began to have an enormous amount of respect for Brown because of his dedication, forthrightness, and desire to accomplish what needed to be done. He turned out to be a giant of a man. As to how the clerical workers fared with the company, I would say very well. Many were satisfied just to have a job in that field, but some were not. Those not satisfied advanced themselves to where they were no longer clerical workers. They took courses and moved to higher paying jobs. I didn't follow up on all people we helped, but I did follow the progress of two I knew well. They were still employed at EB after more than twenty years. And by the mid 1990s, they would be three decades with the company.

Basically, we had been focusing our attention towards the bluecollar trades. Those trades were where most of the blacks worked. But we didn't totally limit ourselves to that

issue. A situation arose which gave us the opportunity to get into the white-collar field. We didn't know what to expect, or at least I didn't. We did wonder about the company and how it would react. Nothing had been easy for us. Sure we won some battles. Some were very important ones, but they were never easy.

Our defeats revealed the extent of the problems faced by blacks. They clearly showed the attitudes of some in an atmosphere where we were seeking to make advances. A black, white-collar worker, who had praised everything we were doing in the blue-collar field, stopped me short one day. Because of his praise, and his apparently enthusiastic attitude, I felt we were on the same wavelength. When I mentioned moving into the white-collar area, his ire was raised. At the time, I had no idea he had negative views about the subject of discrimination. In fact, he even talked about areas where he suspected it. Now as I look back on it, I think he was trying to hide his true feelings. He didn't want us exploring the white-collar area at all, but he attended the first meeting we had with some of his co-workers.

He listened intently to problems that his co-workers said they were experiencing. Evidently their problems meant nothing to him. Some proposals were made as a result of that meeting, and I thought the proposals had a lot of merit. My friend did not contribute any input during the meeting, but he cornered me when the meeting adjourned. He told me we shouldn't be too hasty, and mentioned other things that caused me to realize his definite opposition to the proposals. I told him I would consider very carefully what he had said, and if we felt nothing could be done we would meet again as a body. I knew something would be done. His co-workers were dead serious. They wouldn't have met with us if they weren't.

Another meeting was not called though we did meet with one of the individual participants. We never met with the opposition man, and he soon became scarce. He asked and was transferred to California. There eventually came a time when, almost miraculously, things seem to level out. There were still problems but the climate had become much better between EB and us. I'm not implying everything had become rosy. I don't believe that could have ever happened. But it seemed as if things had mellowed. Some situations still caused fighting between us, but never to a point where one side walked out. I think EB, or at least some we were working with, had turned the corner near the end of 1965. That turn seemed to have caused momentum to gather, because in early 1966, we began focusing our attention on the young, and the near young adults.

We wanted to test the waters. To do that, we would have to involve younger people. We had tried earlier to start a program that would prepare youth for future employment. We had walked from business to business trying to interest them in hiring young black people. For fear we would be in conflict with child labor laws, the program died in its infancy. Now the opportunity had presented itself again. We set out to see how many youth we could reach. Earlier we had reached an agreement with EB to "train the untrainable." The idea, which originated with EB, aimed at finding a method of training workers who would not qualify for apprenticeship programs.

We wanted to overcome the obstacles of cultural deprivation, and that meant finding another method of judging the trainability of workers. The program was directed at the hard-core unemployed, and really focused our attention on them instead of giving lip

service only. Of the many industrial relations officials with whom we met, again I can't give Robert O. Brown enough credit. In the beginning, I think he really was a non-believer. But, however doubtful he was, it certainly didn't take him long to realize there were many problems at EB. When he discovered the magnitude of problems facing minorities and women, he undertook to struggle for change. I can say truthfully he became, if he was not already, personally involved in the problem of the less fortunate.

Since 1909, the NAACP had focused concern on the plight of those who were less fortunate. We were seeing some of them everyday and were highly interested in increasing their chances for fruitful employment. When EB, particularly Brown, discussed the less fortunate citizens with us, I was overjoyed. Reporter Malcolm Morse, of the *Norwich Bulletin*, interviewed me about this opportunity. I told him, "This may be a stepping stone to bigger things to come." I closed the interview saying, "They are interested in training the so-called untrainable and so are we." We began a "job register" and tried to fit hard-core unemployed where they were needed. And our focus wasn't just on EB.

In our efforts to get the program off the ground, we contacted many businesses. Brown almost single handedly did the job, with EB and the state also helping. The ceiling age of the apprenticeship program rose in order to increase minority participation. We thought the ideal time for a youth seminar would be during their spring break, but we began the discussions too late and had to settle for summer. We knew that children go away during the summer months, so we worried, fretted, and hoped we could attract a mere seventy-five youths. But Brown was the biggest worrier of all. Although the event was well publicized in the schools, churches, and news media, and letters were sent to the students, we still worried. Then came the night of July 14, 1966. We counted seventy-five youngsters who entered the building well before time for the program to begin. And more were on their way. Incredibly, that first seminar drew over two hundred.

The affair was held at Shiloh Baptist Church, and mostly high school students attended. For school dropouts there was a special section. While Norwich was excluded from participating because their seminar would be held at a later date, high school students from as far away as Colchester attended. Clarence Faulk, branch labor and industry chair, moderated. Also participating in the seminar, besides EB, were the American Velvet Company of Stonington, and the Southern New England Telephone Company. My mother handled the refreshments and did the best she could, but we weren't prepared for such a huge turnout. Because of this initial experiment, we knew there would have to be a second seminar and that, because of lack of space, we would have to change locations.

In 1967, we held seminar number two at New London High School, which had plenty of open space. This time a caterer handled refreshments. Arthur Greene, director of the Civil Rights Commission, was the guest speaker. He spoke on the need for education and the training of young people. He said those adults of the future could depend on his office to see that anti-discrimination laws were observed. This seminar also had more than two hundred participants. EB, American Velvet, and Southern New England Telephone were joined by the Connecticut State Employment Service and others. We knew we had to prepare for seminar number three.

The 1968 seminar was the last under my presidency. I don't think it was because of me, but this was really the best seminar of all. We drew well over three hundred students.

The festivities featured, as our guest speaker, Malvin R. Goode, the first black national TV network newsman. Since 1966, when only three companies participated, we had grown, by 1968, to where the now eager participating companies had swelled to twenty.

In trying to get his point across to the youth, Mal Goode reached back through the years. Goode declared, "I'm glad for this conference. Maybe we will be able to make up for many years of neglect. It won't be for you like it was for me. Millions of doors were closed then. Those doors are open now for the youngsters able to move through." He inspired them to act honorably in the years ahead, "Take advantage of these new doors of opportunity, not only for the money, but for the chance you will be given to make a contribution to your society, to your country. There's more to life than a good job, a good home, and a good time. A man isn't anything unless he can make a contribution." Goode went on, "You are no better than anyone else. And nobody is better than you. Now, go out and prove it. I'm quoting the greatest man in the world. The man who said those things to me and my brothers was my daddy. And now I'm saying them to you."

Goode spoke briefly on black history. He told of some of the accomplishments of black persons. And he was adamant about their exclusions from history books. He briefly mentioned the race riots going on at that time. And Goode talked about the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., whom, he said, he had interviewed fifty-six times. According to Goode, the last interview was eight days before Dr. King was assassinated.

With a thought applicable to the times, Goode quoted Dr. King, "We are going to live together like brothers, or die together like fools." He finished his rousing speech by telling the youngsters, "You have a responsibility to use the talent you have. Do not forget your homes and your parents' sacrifices. Never be ashamed of your background and your heritage. If you have anything at all, boys and girls, develop it now when you're young. There is nothing like a good name. The future is bright for those who will work for it. You are living in a real good day."

In attendance for Goode's presentation were people such as Virginia Christian, State Board of Education; James B. James, Minority Group Representative of the state; James Harris, Coordinator of Civil Rights for the State of Connecticut; Arthur Greene, Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities; Henry Randall, Norwich NAACP branch President; Artelia Green, mistress of ceremonies; Eugene Rosier, Youth Council president; and L. Padula, Higher Education Financial Assistance and an advisor for college scholarships.

We proudly added a summer jobs program for the youth, but some adults also benefited. About one hundred youth signed up for jobs that summer. Robert O. Brown, spearheading this phase of the program, told the audience that, "No effort will be spared to try to get the young people summer employment." Mr. Brown predicted that they would look back proudly on that night, which would "fulfill" a part of a dream that all of the committee had.

I would be leaving office at the end of 1968 and had no idea where we would go in 1969. I had tried hard to leave office at the end of 1967, but with Phyllis Hylton's intervention, I had decided to remain in office. Hylton's activism was well known in the community, and I am glad to have had energy enough to stay and see, and take part in the

best of all of our seminars. The number of participating companies and the solid attendance made my last seminar a success. When it was reported that one hundred eleven youths were to find employment that summer, my final year in office could not have been any better.

Brown, in his report, wrote the final chapter of my presidency concerning the 1968 seminar, "I feel we should be proud of the results. The overall attendance and work performance of summer employees appears to be good." He mentioned the one hundred eleven who got jobs as a result of the seminar. He also said, "More were hired than had signed." He reported the list of employers and the number of employees they had hired for the summer.

An array of companies participated in my final seminar including: EB, U.S. Submarine Base, Underwater Sound Laboratory, Southern New England Telephone, Pfizer, Bradlees, and Dow Chemical. Also Sears Roebuck, Navy Superintendent of Ships, Sheffield Tube, American Velvet, National Foremen's Institute, Montgomery Ward, Connecticut Light and Power Company, Arwood and the Robertson Paper Box Company, and the New London Automotive Trades Association. Each of the twenty participating companies helped to underwrite the cost of the seminar.

The seminars were good for businesses, good for the NAACP, and, above all, good for the youngsters who participated in them. The seminars, of course, were a tremendous undertaking, an undertaking that was worth every dollar spent. These worthwhile programs continued into the 1970s. Among others, Spider Lockhart, a New York Giants football player, was guest speaker. Jackie Robinson, baseball's major league trail blazing super hero also was a guest speaker. Newspapers, especially *The Day*, covered these programs extensively. The *Norwich Bulletin* and *Hartford Courant* also found the programs newsworthy.

## Yellow Cab

Of all the cases we dealt with, the Yellow Cab case was the one that made me the most vengeful. The case ended in 1964, but it had been hanging around for months prior to that. I will never forget what company officials put us through. We had received a formal complaint against the company in 1962. We processed the complaint, then received notice the complainant had found other employment. We invalidated the complaint, but continued to skirmish with the company. We wanted them to know we were still in business. As it turned out, it seemed they didn't think we meant business.

Each time we visited the company it was a merry-go-round. Sometimes they would tell us, believably, "We don't have any openings at this time." At other times we would be told, "If we have an opening we'll get in touch with you." We did have people who were interested in cab driving. But we left it up to the company's integrity to honor their words. It was a cat and mouse game from the beginning, but we had no way of knowing it at the time. What ensued in July 1964 was quite accidental. Being in the vicinity of one of Yellow Cab's competitors one afternoon, we stopped in. Clarence Faulk and I were interested in learning what special requirements were needed to operate a taxicab. We didn't know, so we thought we had better be informed as to what they were. The company we were visiting had, at that time and in the past, black drivers on its payroll.

After receiving the information we were seeking, the conversation changed. We mentioned that Yellow Cab hadn't had an opening in months. We said the company must be very good to its employees. So good, in fact, that none ever left. To the competitor, this seemed an insult. He snapped back, "That's a lie." He went on to tell us, "M \_\_\_\_\_ left us last week and went to work for Yellow Cab. And if I think about it hard enough, I can give you the names of some others. And it hasn't been that long ago either." Well that did it. I tried not to show anger, but I don't think I succeeded too well.

Disgusted, Faulk and I sat in our automobile. Not only was I upset with Yellow Cab, I was upset with myself. Faulk brought up something about strategy. I told him that we didn't need any strategy for the job we had to do on Yellow Cab. I told him we were armed and, with or without a formal complaint, we were going to Yellow Cab right then. When we arrived at the cab company, we were greeted and treated cordially. We listened to the two men tell us, "We haven't had any openings in months, but when we get one we'll call you." My blood became heated. Faulk and I looked at each other. We both sensed what the other was thinking. I asked, "Do you have a person on you payroll named M \_\_\_\_\_?" There was a moment of silence. I was ready for the attack.

We couldn't allow the shocked officials, their mouths wide open, to begin any further distortion. I reminded them, "You have a contract with the federal government, and that contract, as you know, carries a non-discriminatory clause." Faulk then added the last nail in the coffin. "We've got a letter all written," he said, "and depending on your answer, we will know whether to send it or not." He explained in no uncertain terms that the letter dealt with the company's hiring practices. The letter, he said, mentioned dates of our visits, names of individuals who have been turned away, and dates of their visits to the company. He didn't stop there, "We have enough to have the government pull your contract." The contract was for \$25,000, an amount insufficient to be covered by law. In fact, at the time, I think, for a government contract to contain a non-discriminatory clause, it had to be \$100,000 or more. And, unless I had missed something, those two company officials were not aware of this stipulation.

Faulk finished, and through the aura of shock still surrounding the officials, I injected my final words, "We are not going to send you anyone, but we expect you to have a Negro on your payroll in exactly two weeks." We then walked out.

Hurriedly, we wrote a news release and called the press. The papers called Yellow Cab Company officials, confronted them with our release, and the company responded with their side of the story. It denied any racial discrimination. All Faulk and I were left with was to recommend that our board take action.

The board met and was briefed by Clarence Faulk. Board members voted for direct action if the Cab Company didn't hire a black by August 1. We had our way. Our board had put additional pressure on the company to deliver, or face demonstrations.

The next company press release was simply a continuance of their past. They lied. However, this time they lied in public. It didn't matter to me one way or the other if they continued their falsehoods. Either the company would hire a black, or else. The company had tricked us; now the burden, and the trick, weighed on their shoulders. It was as simple as that. By midweek of the second week, Joe DeBono, reporting for the *Hartford*

*Courant* called and told me the cab company officials said they had “two Negroes” in mind. “If one of them refuses the job,” Joe told me, “the company will hire the other one.” The following morning the story appeared in the Hartford papers. The company had indeed made an announcement. “We expect to put a Negro on the payroll by Saturday. We have two possibilities, one off the street and another who is presently working for one of our competitors,” the article said. That part of the article was satisfactory, but the second part was not. “Even though we are in the process of hiring a Negro, we deny that we have a policy of discrimination against Negroes.” Regardless, by the end of the week, Yellow Cab Company had broken the color line. They hired a black man, Leon Hall, from Groton, a man I have never met.

This incident was a verification of the bi-racial commission and the Fair Housing Practices Board, and their lack of powers. The commission asked the company to meet with them, but Yellow Cab said “no thanks.” This episode was in 1964. Since that time, Yellow Cab has changed hands. It should be said that the 1964 episode does not reflect on those who became the new owners. After this incident in 1964, Yellow Cab has hired on a nondiscriminatory basis.

### **Yardney Electric**

Early in 1965, as a result of complaints against Yardney Electric Company, we filed for a review of the company’s policies with the President’s Committee on Equal Opportunities. The complaints pertained to training and promotions at that Pawcatuck plant. Among others, the firm had contracts with the U.S. Air Force that forbade racial, color, or religious bias. As with most complaints filed against larger companies, the charges were denied, which is exactly what should have happened. Unless company officials were just plain stupid and decided to take a case to court, the review of the complaint was handled without fanfare. I don’t remember any company officials being “just plain stupid.” It would have been foolish for a company to seek court action because of the preponderance of evidence favoring our complainants. And, usually, if a company decided to fight, the review, instead of being general, became microscopic. It was difficult for a large company to disprove discrimination. In fact, it was virtually impossible. Large companies have several or more supervisors and it takes but one to get a company in “trouble.” It makes no difference how liberal the company’s policy. If just one supervisor has an attitude problem, the company is probably stymied if a complaint is filed.

I am reminded of the statements of the plant manager and the plant secretary at Yardney. The manager was quoted as saying, “We will definitely prove any charge is false if it concerns color, race or religion.” The secretary said that contracts with the government and union carried provisions that prohibited discrimination at the plant. The plant manager also said it was unknown how many nonwhite employees the company had. This, to be sure, was difficult to believe, because, during the same period, we were dealing with EB. EB, with about 15,000 employees, knew how many nonwhites worked there. Yardney had only 500 employees. Why was it so difficult to keep count of nonwhite employees?

I don’t remember which reporter handled the story of our complaint against Yardney, but whoever it was did *The Day*, ourselves, and Yardney Electric Corporation a disservice. He quoted Clarence Faulk, our labor and industry chairman, who had released



the news of the complaint to *The Day*. Part of the February 13, 1965, news story said, "He refused to comment on additional action to be taken in the Yardney situation or on previous NAACP discrimination charges against General Dynamics/Electric Boat, Woolworth's store on State St. and Yellow Cab Company on Golden St." Faulk noted he was involved only in the latter case and added, "They did hire a Negro driver." After Faulk's quote about Yellow Cab, the reporter took the liberty to add the following statement: "All previous employment discrimination charges lodged by the local NAACP have proved to be unfounded."

The reporter used our press release to editorialize his opinions. What gall! My blood began to boil. The reporter had no idea what he was saying, or what damage he might be doing by connecting an editorial to the end of our press release. I quickly found myself at the typewriter, hoping to make him eat his words. After the inevitable mistakes and corrections, I was finally satisfied with my hurried letter.

*To the Editor of the Day:*

*On February 13, your paper carried a story of charges by NAACP of discrimination filed against Yardney Electric Corp.*

*In that story, you stated that, NAACP had previously charged General Dynamics/Electric Boat, Woolworth's store on State St. and Yellow Cab Co. on Golden St. with discrimination. You also stated: All previous employment discrimination charges lodged by the local NAACP have proved unfounded.*

*I wish to take issue with you on both of those misleading and erroneous statements. You owe us an apology for stating that we had charged Woolworth's store on State St. with discrimination. You have no such record. As far as any NAACP charges of discrimination against any other company being proved unfounded, I challenge you to print your proof.*

*Linwood W. Bland, Jr.*

*21 Mather Court New London Conn. Feb. 14, 1965*

I mailed my letter to the newspaper. Kenneth Grube, editorial editor at the paper, telephoned me. He had a better idea. Grube said, "Instead of this letter, why don't you write a news release and make a story out of it?" This suggestion brought about a serious, but friendly argument. I wasn't buying a news story. I wanted my letter printed. Grube tried to convince me that a second or third page story would be better than a letter. I insisted that he print my letter as it was. I did not want a story, and though it took some doing, I prevailed. My letter was printed. At the end of the letter was this:

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Mr. Bland's comment is well taken. In fact, employment discrimination complaints made to state and federal agencies seldom are immediately resolved in the formal sense and, in the cases cited, no decisions have been made public. In the Woolworth store incident, the NAACP picketed the State St. branch in protest against the chain's failure, at the time, to desegregate its lunch counters in the South,*

*and it did not involve any allegation of discrimination in hiring practices. The Day did not intend to convey erroneous information and sets the record straight.*

I don't know how many people read the letter. I know I did, just to make sure it was in print. I felt that I had to write it to keep our reputation clean. I think it worked.

### **Colchester's Hartford National Bank**

I really had not anticipated being directly involved in another case outside of New London in 1966; however, the firing of a young woman in Colchester led to my involvement in her case. Colchester had a local NAACP that I knew nothing about at all. I discovered that the branch was inactive at the time of the situation. On July 18, 1966, Earnestine Clement filed a complaint regarding her firing from the Colchester branch of the Hartford National Bank. Through an agreement with the Urban League of Greater Hartford, she had received training as a proof machine operator for a position at the branch.

I learned about the training program after a visit to the main office with Wilber Smith and Paige Alvin, Hartford and Colchester NAACP leaders. Mrs. Clement initially worked at the branch in Hartford; however, they transferred her to Colchester. The transfer was a good deal for her because, as a Colchester resident, she would no longer have to commute to Hartford each working day. Naturally, she jumped at the opportunity to work closer to home. But her enthusiasm quickly turned to gloom. Although she trained and worked only as a proof machine operator in Hartford, the Colchester branch changed and increased her work. The bank required that she work as a teller once a week. In addition, bank officers insisted that she compute interest. She now operated a proof machine, worked as a teller, and computed interest. She worked all three positions for almost a year.

Clement began to plan for an out-of-state vacation. To supplement the vacation, she applied for a vacation loan. A few days later, the bank manager called her into his office. She assumed that the manager would mention something about the loan. Instead, he told her, "You are slow on Mondays and Fridays." Clement ignored the manager's remarks about being slow. She asked him about the loan. The manager informed her that he had hired someone else to perform her job. She was speechless; then, he hit her with another bombshell. She could have her loan by simply agreeing to return to work in Hartford. This was a case of blackmail.

The manager's nightmarish remarks continued. He told her that he had nothing else for her to do at this bank. Ms. Clement asked when the manager wanted her in Hartford and was told as soon as the new girl is trained. Within a few days, she asked for the following day off and was at first denied. Ms. Clement then informed the manager that she needed the day off to take care of an urgent matter and was eventually told she could have it off.

The next day she drove to Hartford to the Hartford National Bank to meet with bank officials about her plight. She wanted to know why the manager would hire someone else in her place. Before the personnel official could complete his answer, a call came in from the Colchester manager. The two managers then engaged in a discussion about Ms.

Clement. According to the young lady, the Colchester man told the personnel officer that he had not authorized Ms. Clement's day off. When the Hartford official heard this, there was no way Ms. Clement could reason with him. He told her that there was not one single thing that he could do.

Saddened, she returned to work at the Colchester branch. When the manager arrived, he again called her into his office and told her that he had given her a chance to quit and said that the employees don't run this bank. She told me that she had nothing else to say until he brought her her final paycheck. She asked for her termination slip and was told that it would be mailed to her. As far as I was concerned, nothing could have been more ideal for me. If I had to plan anything, I couldn't have done it better since my vacation was to begin July 25. Had I not had that time off coming, we would have been in a pickle because I didn't have a back up.

I sat on the complaint until the 22nd when, in what turned out to be a classic, I moved rapidly in my investigation. I punched out at 4:30 and went directly to Colchester. Because Colchester was a small community, I assumed that someone in the town clerk's office had heard about the young lady being fired. I attempted to elicit a comment from the woman I was dealing with in that office, but if she had heard about the firing, she had no comment. I asked her to make two copies of Ms. Clement's termination slip. The clerk agreed, letting me know what the service would cost. I purposely fumbled through my wallet. I knew it was amateurish, but I wanted the clerk to observe my plight and to comment on it. She did. I laid my NAACP life membership card down on some papers on the desk. She certainly saw it. I found the paper I was searching for.

I thought my plans were working exactly as I wanted. If I figured correctly, the clerk would get the news out provided she was smart enough to put two and two together. Leaving the clerk's office, I drove to the complainant's former place of work. I wanted a conference with the bank manager. Arriving at the bank, I found it locked. I decided to knock on the glass door anyway, and the manager came to the door to see what I wanted. He looked at me curiously, motioning that the bank was closed. I really did not believe him immediately. However, a sign showed that the hours called for the bank to be closed at 4 p.m. It would reopen at 6 p.m. A setback, but only momentarily.

I held a copy of the termination slip in the window for the manager to get a close look at it. I wanted him to know that someone had taken a serious interest in Clement's firing. He looked at the paper without comment. I was irritated because he did not volunteer any information. I pointedly told him I wanted to discuss the firing of the young lady. That set him off. We started to scream at one another through the closed door. Ultimately, I quieted down to hear his final words, "The situation is out of my hands. You will have to go to Hartford, but they're closed too." I turned, walked a few yards away, then turned and looked back at the manager. He waved his arms. I think he was telling me to get lost. He pulled the window shade down, and that was the last time I saw him.

I had not been in Colchester for some time and I decided to drive around there looking for black people. I conversed with individuals and talked to small gatherings. Some people seemed satisfied; yet others were not satisfied at all. To handle this problem, I suggested that the latter group reactivate the defunct NAACP. I would be

available to help if needed. Some of the people who knew Ms. Clement began to make phone calls, satisfying me that the Colchester branch would be operating soon.

By mid Saturday morning, I was in Colchester once again. I urged former members to call a meeting and offered my assistance should they need guidance. Local leaders scheduled a meeting for the following day. I told them that since I was going to Hartford on Monday to talk to officials, I wished they had a president that could come with me and learn how the NAACP worked. Calls went out again. Returning home, I placed my own calls to national officials in New York. The office there was closed, as it was the weekend. Without national's help, I would have to preside at the Sunday meeting. But I had other things in mind that had to be taken care of in my preparations for Sunday and Monday. I wanted to advertise the Sunday meeting; and also I wanted to send messages to friends and foes in Hartford.

I wrote two press releases for the *Norwich Bulletin* and *Hartford Courant*. I told both newspapers that the situation in Colchester was near the "explosive" state. A black woman had been fired because of her race. I did not mention the name of the bank or the woman; I referred to the bank as a business. Both papers carried the stories. I naturally wondered about the reaction of the Hartford officials, but was stunned at the reaction at the Sunday Colchester meeting. Some at the meeting did not take kindly to my news release. Dissenters felt that the release would bring reprisals.

I assured them that we needed the articles as a psychological tool. I told them they would be surprised at the results and urged them not to worry about reprisals. In the *Courant* piece, I made unflattering comments about the Connecticut Civil Rights Commission, claiming they were "unwilling" or "unable" to solve our problem. This accusation upset the commission; they had, however, taken Ms. Clement's complaint earlier. And while I did not know how far the commission's investigators had gone, what I did know was that they had not resolved the complaint.

After the newspapers hit the street that Sunday morning, commission representatives from Hartford called to let me know that my not too friendly comments were not appreciated. They told me I worded the release incorrectly. Another person admonished me, saying I should be ashamed of myself because, "You know that we cannot publicly, by law, defend ourselves against your unwarranted attack." In short, they raked me over the coals. But I was not trying to make them look bad, I was trying to force them to handle complaints more quickly.

The reorganization meeting at Colchester resulted in Paige Alvin being elected president of the Colchester NAACP. I stayed around long enough to make arrangements to pick up Alvin for the trip to Hartford. At home that evening, I called Wilber Smith, Hartford resident and vice-president of the Connecticut State Conference of NAACP Branches. I described to him what occurred over the weekend, including Clement's case. I also told Smith I'd be coming to Hartford at 9 a.m. Monday. "I am bringing President Alvin with me," I told him, "and if you can find a way to get free at that time, I would appreciate your presence." Smith agreed to meet me in front of the bank. I went to bed severely stressed about the Monday meeting, Colchester members, and Civil Rights Commission representatives. The press release that had made the members sweat probably made the bank officials sweat as well.

Paige Alvin and I met Wilber Smith in front of the Hartford National Bank. We discussed the case with Smith, clarifying vague points for him; then we proceeded into the bank. I think we were expected because all eyes in the bank seemed to be focused on us. There may have been some people of color employed at the bank; however, they escaped my eyes. We met with two bank officials. The matter became laughable as each manager tried to explain the Colchester bank manager's reason for firing Ms. Clement. They both failed miserably in explaining their case. In fact, one of the officials excused himself for a "second," and we never saw him again.

The lone bank official continued trying to explain the firing. Speaking on behalf of Ms. Clement, I told the official that I wanted Ms. Clement reinstated to her former position. And further, if she is not reinstated, I said, "A ring of pickets will be put around the Colchester bank." I knew what I was saying, but I was not sure we could pull it off. I had no idea if the New London branch would vote for picketing. The official pleaded with Smith, asking how he could let me, the president from New London, travel all the way to Colchester, which is out of my jurisdiction." Without hesitation, Smith shot back, "These fellows go anywhere to root out evil." I could not contain myself. I had to laugh.

The manager was not laughing. He asked me how things were at Sullivan Motors. I was the one not laughing now. I took his question as a subtle threat. "So you've done some checking," I responded, "and discovered where I work. Well, let me tell you something. There's absolutely nothing you can do to me on my job."

Smith decided to change the conversation. He talked about the activities of the Urban League. As Smith told how the Urban League managed to get banks to train young black females, I suddenly felt that an Urban League official should have been contacted. I would have contacted Bill Brown of the Urban League if I had known about the agreement. The bank official told us he would be contacting us "in the very near future." Our meeting came to an end. Alvin and I thanked Smith for his assistance and we headed back to Colchester to visit Ms. Clement. We went over points discussed in the meeting in Hartford. I asked her to contact us should anything occur pertaining to her job. I was optimistic about her returning to work. I did not think that officials wanted a confrontation with us again, and I returned to New London hoping to get some rest. Beginning that past Friday, I had engaged in four days of non-stop activity. Although I was tired, at least I was on vacation.

But on entering my hallway, I could hear my telephone ringing. The call was from the Civil Rights Commission office with one of those good news/bad news messages. "What in the hell went on at the bank?" asked the caller. I related what had transpired. He thought I would never hear from the bank because the bank called the commission. I did not like this in the least. I wanted to know when the commission was going to the bank. "Linwood," I was told, "you know well that you can't participate in our discussions. We have rules that we have to follow you know." The caller added, "But we are going to the bank tomorrow. They want us to bring Ms. Clement with us." I responded in anger, "The commission had the complaint long before she gave it to us, and now you've been called in to mess it up." Probably, I should not have said that—but that's how I felt.

I realized during the conversation that this call from the commission signaled a victory. We had forced the issue. I told the caller I expected nothing short of complete

reinstatement. He assured me that my wishes would be granted. In addition, the bank had to sign a statement guaranteeing that there would be no reprisals against Ms. Clement.

In six days, this case was successfully completed. The *Hartford Courant* headline for July 28, 1966, read, "NAACP CLAIMS VICTORY; FIRED NEGRO REHIRED." the *Norwich Bulletin* and New London's *Day* newspaper also carried the story. I really felt sympathy for Ms. Clement. Her firing was truly unfair. The bank manager would never have fired an experienced white female worker and replaced her with an inexperienced black female worker. He had fired Ms. Clement, however, an experienced black worker, and replaced her with an inexperienced white worker.

I learned from a commission field representative that the firing had overtones other than racial. The bank manager had political aspirations and had promised a local politician that he would hire the politician's relative. He thus had replaced Ms. Clement with a recent high school graduate, taking advantage of the fact that no active civil rights group existed in Colchester. Ms. Clement remained at the bank for another two years after returning to work. In addition, a road building program in the Colchester area actively sought black workers. The NAACP presence made these things possible.

Loren Marvin, Colchester's first selectman, had a great deal to say during the confrontation. Newspapers contacted me about his remarks after the case was almost completed. According to reporters, Marvin thought I should have gotten in touch with him about the case. He minimized the situation. He thought that black people in Colchester were satisfied. The town had two black teachers, and others were doing well with salaries. In the long run, I did not have any desire to talk with Marvin. As far as I was concerned, he could talk with the reactivated local branch.

Regarding the Civil Rights Commission representatives, I mellowed and publicly gave them some credit. I did not want a running feud. After all, Arthur Greene, Robert "Skip" Walsh, Angelo Serluccha, and Mario Vigezzi, representatives of the commission, hopefully, were still my friends. Chances were overwhelming that I would have to call upon them again. I couldn't afford to burn bridges, as my mood in 1966 was optimistic on some fronts, but somber on others.

### **Hair Raising Incident**

We put our checkers to work again in 1964 on an issue of labor discrimination. I am not sure who brought the problem to my attention, but whoever it was had tears in his eyes. "That's not right at all," the man complained. He was referring to some black youngsters he said he had met in a Main Street restaurant one evening. "They want to go back home and they're scared to go. But you will have to talk to them yourself," he explained. "Then you can make your own determination of the facts. They said they would be back in town Friday evening." I went to the restaurant that Friday evening and waited. I met with the man who had told me about the young blacks. As we sat talking, seven youngsters entered the restaurant. I was introduced and they told their story.

What I heard was hair raising and—to tell the truth—almost unbelievable. They said they had been talked into coming to Connecticut. They had been picked up in the rural areas of Virginia, Delaware, and Maryland. They described living in unsanitary

conditions and cramped quarters. But, that wasn't all they had to say. They said their working hours were long (over ten hours a day) and their wages low for the hours they worked. They told us that at times they received fifteen dollars and, at other times, thirty-five dollars. There had been more of them, but some had been sent back home; the ones who had been sent back were quite young, being possibly thirteen or fourteen years old. We learned that there were three others who did not come to town that evening, that a house trailer was where they were lodged, and that they were given their meals free. The trailer, they said, consisted of "two beds, a sofa, and a mattress on the floor for the ten of us." They told us their bosses brought them to town, but they had to get a taxi back to their trailer camp.

I decided to have one of the white checkers from our branch go and check their story. The checker, in order not to arouse any suspicions, had to purchase some items from the boys' employers. The earliest our investigator could act was on a Sunday. He reported back to me that same evening.

As a result of his report, I drafted a number of letters, which were then sent to the state Commission on Civil Rights, the state labor board, the governor, and several lesser officials. My suggestions to the officials were to "move cautiously, but with dispatch." What happened when the state investigators conducted their activities, I'm not sure. But I suspect caution was not part of the plan. For one thing, no one coordinated the investigations. My understanding was, during that week, at least four investigations were going on simultaneously. Of course, this was the last thing I wanted. I had notified each investigating agency of the other agencies involved. With such notification, I had hoped the agencies would contact each other. But that's far from what happened.

It seemed that everyone wanted to get into the act on his own. As it turned out, the investigations were a farce. Because of disorganization and confusion—which we were powerless to stop—when it was all over, we had been betrayed and derailed. Listening to what other investigators told me, it seemed the labor board investigator had practically driven them away. The labor board investigator had told them this situation wasn't under their jurisdiction, which I think, was the crux of the problem. It was not in the labor board investigator's jurisdiction to find how the youngsters lived, or to investigate anything else except wages and hours.

The other investigators had told us there were at least ten black youths working there. However, when we met with the labor board investigator, he told us there were only five youngsters. He said their bosses told him of other youngsters who had been sent home weeks before. The bosses also told him the youngsters never worked on weekends. Even with the complaint about living conditions, the labor investigator told us the living conditions were excellent, better than those of many people right here in New London, and that they only worked a few hours a day. Everything the labor man told us was in direct conflict with the other investigating agencies, our branch investigator, and the youths who had filed the complaint. It was just the previous Sunday evening that our investigator's report showed there were at least eight youngsters working that day. Our NAACP reporter also observed that, "There was a ninth youngster who seemed to be a supervisor."

For whatever reason, the labor board investigator had reported that no labor violations existed. In the face of the evidence, pointing in the direction of truthful

allegations, the labor investigator concluded that no laws had been broken. He also told the youngsters, that because no law have been broken, if they were fired, he wouldn't be able to do anything about it.

I met with the young men the following Friday evening. They related what the labor man had told them and claimed he was wrong. I didn't tell the youngsters what I was planning, but I did tell them not to worry. That Sunday, I paid a visit to their boss. I wasn't received too cordially, and the visit began on a rocky note. The boss said a lawsuit would be filed because of the loss of business. Those losses were said to be a result of our publicizing erroneous information. The information was not erroneous; but I could visualize the labor board investigator taking the witness stand against us. I knew if we could keep the young complainants from leaving town, we could win. But even if we kept them here, we certainly did not need the complexities of litigation to tie us up.

I didn't exactly humble myself at the thought of a suit, but I did tell the boss I was sorry for the loss of business. I wasn't being hypocritical when I told him that. I really was sorry for his loss of revenue. But my being sorry didn't alter any other facts. And that had nothing to do with the signed complaints that I had in my possession. The boss said the youngsters had lied about all phases of the operation including their being recruited from below the Mason-Dixon Line. I made several points of fact. I told the man that the youngsters were recruited from those states, by whatever method, and the their overall operations bordered on slavery. I also told him that it was the "perception that people would be considering, and not as he claimed, that he was helping youngsters who previously had nothing at all."

Considering that the visit had begun in a rocky manner and that a "screaming and shaky" conference had ensued, the confrontation surprisingly was terminated on a "smiling basis." I did not ask what the company was going to do or how they were going to conduct their business in the future. I knew they were in an embarrassing position, and I knew that we had put them there. We shook hands vigorously, and I left them with their thoughts. Soon, on Route 32, I was driving back to New London with thoughts of my own. Within a week of my visit to the camp, their operation was no more. They had closed up shop about three days after I had visited their operating grounds.

As for the state labor board investigator, I don't know what his motivations were, but he appeared to be an enemy. I haven't determined if he was anti-NAACP, anti-black, or just plain stupid. If I had to hazard a guess, I would say he was a little of all three. I asked for a copy of the official findings because I felt they bungled a perfectly clear cut case of gross injustice.



# EIGHT

## Manure, Poverty, Segregation, and Protest

*...refuting notions of black inferiority*

While the actions of the state labor board seemed truly unjust to me, the actions of a town's health official made me angry. The incident that raised my ire I refer to as the chicken manure incident.

### **The Chicken Manure Incident**

In February 1965, I met with Mr. and Mrs. Lowell Cherry in Hebron. The Cherrys, a black family, had been arrested two days earlier, charged by a local health official with "maintaining a nuisance" on their property. They had been released from jail on a bond of \$50 each. If the Cherry's pre-teenage son had not been in school when his parents were arrested, he, too, would have faced arrest since his name also appeared on the property deed. The incident should never have happened. Somewhere between the initial complaint and the issuing of the arrest warrant, something had gone wrong. Exactly what went wrong we don't know, but we found ourselves right in the middle of it.

The case involved a pile of chicken manure, and the original complaint was against the property's previous owners, Morris and Arthur Goldstein. The complaint was made during the summer months when the Goldsteins had owned the property. The family made no serious effort to correct the alleged problem. The property was then sold to the Cherrys at the end of October 1964. Karl H. Links, Hebron Health Officer, visited the Cherrys' residence shortly after they had occupied their new home. Links discussed the manure pile with them and was told the manure belonged to Goldstein and Links should talk to them. The Cherrys heard nothing else from Links for two months. In the meantime, Links was negotiating with the Goldstein family.

It was evident that oral discussions took place between Links and the Goldsteins before the Cherrys owned the property. It wasn't until the Cherrys took possession of the property that Links began his correspondence with the Goldsteins. He then corresponded later with the Cherry family. Links was to notify Morris Goldstein in writing in December 1964. I still have this notice from the office of the local director of health and the subsequent reply from Morris and Alfred Goldstein. Sometime in January of 1965, the Cherrys accepted ownership of the pile of manure for a planned garden.

They also accepted a pile of trouble. Clarence Laking, who had originally complained about the Goldsteins depositing the manure, did not file a complaint against the Cherrys. According to Links, the depositing of the manure was the result of a longstanding feud between the Laking and Goldstein families. Even though the Laking

family did not complain when the Cherry family took possession of the manure, Links transferred the original complaint to the Cherry family. Links obtained an arrest warrant and a state police officer served it. Mrs. Cherry told me the officer was apologetic, and suggested to her candidly that something smells in this matter and it's not that manure. Mrs. Cherry showed me the January 7, 1965, letter of "Notice of Abatement" along with another letter written by Links personally. I also still have the Notice of Abatement and Links' personal letter plus Mr. Cherry's reply to both.

After first speaking to the complainants, I went on a tour of the Hebron area. I felt, as the police officer had, that there was something of a "foul nature" about the case. Every property I had seen had at least one pile of manure, and often there were several piles. I had inspected the pile on the Cherry property, but it was winter so I did not dig into it. Even at that, I saw nothing that should have caused a complaint. If I had seen anything, I certainly would have told the Cherrys that Links had valid grounds for issuing the order. Even the Laking family, who had originally complained to Links, had two huge piles of manure on their property, not to mention the horses they kept. Neither the horses nor the manure piles were unusual sights for Hebron, which was an agricultural area and zoned as such. It appeared to me that there were no violations of law of any kind. With that in mind, I wanted to know much more about the situation.

Why all the to-do about nothing then? Why were the Cherrys arrested? Links said the manure on the Cherry property contained dead chicken carcasses. The carcasses drew rats, he said, and, therefore, the manure was "a nuisance and filth injurious to the public." I called Karl Links in an effort to discuss the situation with him. He was not at all pleasant. In between his calling the NAACP "Communitistic" or "Communist backed," he denied that his actions were discriminatory. He said he was only doing his job.

I told him the Cherry family had been arrested on his complaint. That seemed to come as a shock to him. And what was shocking to me was, he denied any arrests had taken place. When I told him that Mr. and Mrs. Cherry were out on bail, his response was, "I'll press vigorously for a conviction then." I realized that nothing could be accomplished by talking to Links any further. I put in a call to the Civil Rights Commission but was told that none of the investigators had returned from the field. I thought it important enough to brief the person to whom I was speaking because I wanted to let the field representatives know of my conversation with Links. I even gave the listener an earful of my "hypothetical" aspects of the case.

Links later made some additional revelations. He confirmed that he had returned to the Cherry home after he had learned that the NAACP was contacted. He said he had taken pictures of the manure pile on the Cherry property. I spoke with the Cherrys. They had not given him permission to enter their property. Therefore, when a field representative of the Civil Rights Commission contacted the Cherrys, their complaint asserted that Links had "failed to grant full and equal treatment under the law." They also argued that Links was "violating their Fourth Amendment rights of protection against illegal search."

Two field representatives of the Civil Rights Commission, Arthur Greene and Robert "Skip" Walsh, went to the Cherry home on February 8. They went with pitchforks in hand. They found "one ashen bone and about twelve chicken feathers." Walsh, after

finding no evidence to sustain Links' findings, also toured Hebron. He made notes of other properties containing manure piles. A hearing on the matter was scheduled in Willimantic the following day, February 9, 1965. Walsh visited with Links the evening before the hearing and said Links was bitter and called him a number of unprintable names. Links told Walsh that he (Links) was determined the Cherrys get convicted. Following the evening visit, Walsh said he couldn't discuss with Links what they had discovered. He said Links hardly listened. I obtained a copy of the letter that Links wrote the evening after Walsh's visit. The letter shows how disturbed Links was at this point:

*Today I had the pleasure of a visit by one of your field men, whose name I neglected to note, in regard to an alleged violation of the Anti-Discrimination law or the Civil Rights Act. He claimed to have spent a half hour at the Cherrys and inspecting the manure pile in question and another pile on the property of a white man next door and adjacent to a restaurant. His contention was that there were no dead birds in either pile. Also there was a pile of horse manure on the property of the complainant and located about twenty-five feet away. I also reinspected these piles and investigated the alleged pile of horse manure. This turned out to be a pile of top soil with no manure in it. I took five color pictures of the two piles in question, close ups of decaying birds in one and carcasses with feathers attached in the 'Cherry manure pile.' I should have used the word skeleton. A copy of the Notice to the Goldsteins is enclosed, and I can assure you that one violation will be prosecuted as vigorously as the other and I do not propose to press the Cherry affair until the other violation is abated or an arrest made. While, I can assure you, no discrimination was intended or even thought of, I will not have even a suspicion of discrimination in any actions of mine. Also, I wish to assure you that this second violation would have been attended to without the prod and with much better grace than the first.*  
*Respectfully yours, K. H. Links, Health Officer*  
*P.S. May I suggest eyeglasses for your field man?*

The letter to the Civil Rights Commission and the notice of abatement to the Goldsteins shows that Karl Links was stirred into action by the visit of Robert Walsh. On February 7, in my phone conversation with Walsh, I told him to tell the Cherry family the truth about their manure pile. "I didn't see anything obvious myself, but if you find Links is right in his assessment of the situation, then tell the family." With all those other piles of manure on other residential properties in the area, I sensed the problem went further than Links. I felt uncomfortable realizing the health official might have been unwittingly carrying out the prejudices of others. I tried to indicate that to him in our telephone conversation. But he was so antagonistic toward the NAACP, I didn't think he realized what I was saying to him.

While I was talking to Walsh after his visit with Links, Walsh told me, "That pile of manure is clean, and I didn't have to tell the family because they were standing right there watching." Walsh also said that Links didn't "have a leg to stand on." I had assumed such if nothing was found in the digging. Walsh wanted a resolution because he thought the whole issue would be "washed out in court tomorrow." For him, a resolution "would be the best thing that could happen."

Walsh wondered if I would be in Willimantic the next day. I knew I couldn't attend that particular court session, but I knew someone should; so I called Matt Shafner, our attorney. When he said he was scheduled to be in court in New London, I sat down and tried to figure out who was dependable in the Willimantic area. I came up with Professor C. Francis Willey.

I knew it was late to call someone the night before a hearing, but when I explained the circumstances to him, Professor Willey said he would be more than pleased to go. Professor Willey was on the faculty at the Willimantic State Teachers College (now Eastern Connecticut State University), and he assured me he would be there. He said if there was a postponement he would follow it up. I sat up late that evening trying to prepare myself for the worst scenario possible. That, of course, would be the conviction of the Cherry couple. And even if Walsh were correct, that Links didn't have a leg to stand on, there still might have been a conviction. I felt quite uncomfortable about the issue.

I studied all my notes of conversations I had with people in the Hebron area. Talk of a black family moving into the area began when the Cherry family first appeared. One white man told me he didn't want to be a trailblazer. He said the Cherry family, at least he thought it was them, looked at his property and he was glad they didn't want it. Others said as much, but no one, although mentioning names of others who might be prone to discriminatory practices, mentioned the Laking name. That was interesting to me because it was the name of the family who had originally complained about the manure pile. According to Links, the complaint resulted from the longstanding feud between the Lakings and the Goldstein family.

My investigation, and that of the Civil Rights Commission field representatives, led me to believe that the continuing feud predated the Cherry family's visits. This conclusion, coupled with other evidence I was fortunate enough to secure, led me to conclude that the Laking family played no part in the practice of discrimination against the Cherry family.

Links said the reason it took him so long in pressuring the Goldstein family was that he "was doing them a political favor." This revelation was printed in the *Norwich Bulletin*. Mal Morse, writing for the paper, had contacted Links. The reporter wrote,

*The civil rights complaint has disturbed Links greatly. 'It seems to me, I was caught in the middle,' he [Links] said, and, 'when you're between two fires, what do you do?' His next move, he says, will be to remove the taint of discrimination from the charge against the Cherrys.*

*He stated that the Goldsteins deposited the second pile of chicken manure, this time seventy-five feet from a restaurant. Links had ordered them to remove it. "I'm going to hit the Goldsteins first, and when I'm through with them, if the Cherrys still haven't removed their pile, I'll go after them. That way, no one can say I'm discriminating," said Links.*

Professor Willey was in court on February 9. He called me with a report that evening. He had met the Cherry family and discussed the case with them. He told me Attorney Safenovitz, Goldstein's lawyer, represented the Cherrys. Professor Willey also informed

me that Attorney Safenovitz asked that the case be postponed for three weeks. Willey said he had been impressed with Prosecutor Philip M. Dwyer. Prosecutor Dwyer had told the judge that a number of people were involved in the case, including the State Civil Rights Commission. Upon hearing the prosecutor sustain Safenovitz's motion, the judge granted the postponement until March 2. In speaking to Mrs. Cherry after court, Links had told her she had gone about the case in the wrong way. Representative Walsh told Links that he (Links) had two weeks to arrest everyone in Hebron who had manure on their property, or else drop the charges against the black family.

Mrs. Cherry called me that evening. She spoke of Professor Willey, and how she was so elated that someone from the NAACP was in court watching over them. She said, "I am certainly gratified the NAACP has taken such interest in our problems. And regardless of how we make out when we go back, I feel good with the knowledge that we are not alone."

In Willimantic, at the 11th Circuit Court on March 2, 1965, the case against Mr. and Mrs. Lowell Cherry was thrown out. I did not follow up on the case against the Goldsteins because I figured we had accomplished what we had set out to do. To show their appreciation for what we had done, the Cherry family joined our branch. Those in their family who were of age attended our Annual Freedom Fund Dance, held at Ocean Beach early in October 1965. I contacted the Cherrys several times in 1966 to make sure they were experiencing no more problems. All was well with them, and their case became part of the New London branch's history.

### **War on Poverty Program**

In 1965, after the enactment of federal anti-poverty legislation, there came a great deal of pressure on our branch to engage in anti-poverty campaigns. The pressure was particularly troublesome for me. Already thin in active members, we didn't need any additional activities heaped upon us. I had been in contact with others in our southeastern area about the possibility of a poverty program being organized here. I wanted to know what the potential impact a program of that sort would have here. Although I wanted to know, I also wished the idea of a program would go away. I guess that is a strange thing to say in retrospect. But I think anyone realizing how deeply we were involved in local situations, and having to make a choice, would have thought as I did. I was trying to keep abreast of the situation, but at the same time I was trying to remain aloof.

Regardless of what I was attempting, however, there was a chink in my armor. There was one person, Mrs. Lottie Scott, who wouldn't allow me to remain aloof. A Norwich resident, she tried to keep me informed of some unfolding events in her area. I wished someone in New London was as interested as she was. I was hoping some New London blacks would step forward and take the lead by involving themselves in the poverty program. Although a fledgling, the Thames Valley Council for Community Action (TVCCA) program was looking for a director. But I thought it was too early for this move because according to literature that described the composition of such a board, the program had not fulfilled its obligations under the law.

It was required to have certain numbers and types of board members before hiring a director. As far as I was concerned, the board was incomplete. As removed as I could

have been under the circumstances, trying to look the other way, I felt compelled to become directly involved when Mrs. Scott told me of secret interviews taking place for a director. It appeared one man had taken it upon himself to seek out a director. He would have applicants visit his home, or meet for interviews anywhere else appropriate. He was the sole interviewer, the only one making determinations and deciding if a candidate was qualified or not.

James Harris was one of those clandestinely interviewed. Harris, a black Hartford resident, was a member of the Hartford NAACP. He was also a personal friend of mine. He held a B.S. Degree in Business Administration. And among other things, he was state coordinator of the Office of Economic Opportunity. In other words, Harris was already involved in the poverty program on the state level. I contacted him on hearing that he had been interviewed. He confirmed the secret interview. Harris said he was told that he had the qualifications, but he was also told he was "not the man for the job."

Harris told me two others were secretly interviewed for the director's job. I thought that was pretty underhanded, inasmuch as a personnel committee had already been selected. Harris informed me that the interviewer had told him, "Only three people had officially applied for the director's position, but others could be reached by telephone." After hearing this, I wanted to know more, so I began to check the story Harris had related to me. I found he had told me the truth. What the interviewer was doing soured my stomach. It appeared he would interview the prospects privately; then, when their résumés were presented to the personnel committee, he would effectively kill their chances. I took it to mean the interviewer already had a choice in mind. By eliminating the competition, his choice was a certainty. I tried to counteract his shady practice by issuing a press release stating that the NAACP was "insisting the director be a Negro."

After the press release, Attorney Alfred Bingham, chairman of the TVCCA, contacted me. He wanted four members each from the New London and Norwich NAACP branches to meet with four members of TVCCA. Our press release had drawn a response, but I felt that I needed help. I put in a call to the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) in New York and filled them in on what I had discovered. I was told to write a letter of protest to their office. The letter would be held for two weeks with no action taken. If our meeting with TVCCA officials was satisfactory, I was to call New York and kill the letter of protest. If the meeting was unsatisfactory, I would do nothing since my silence would indicate some action by New York officials was necessary.

Norwich and New London NAACP branches each sent four members to meet with the four TVCCA members. The meeting took place on a weekday, which was OK with me, but that weekday happened to be Memorial Day, 1965. I looked around the room of our Norwich meeting place, and what I saw seemed unusual. All four members of the TVCCA were members from the United Fund, a charity organization. Bingham, TVCCA's chairman, was, in addition, chairman of the United Fund organization. Also representing TVCCA were Mrs. Ruby Jo Kennedy, Aaron Palmer, and Rabbi Robert Port. Kennedy was a professor of sociology at Connecticut College; Palmer was director of Catholic Charities; and Rabbi Port was also a vice-president of the Norwich NAACP.

Bingham made it clear that it was Rabbi Port who had initiated the idea of getting the two branches to meet with them. Even though the NAACP branches were the largest or-

ganizations in the area representing minorities and poor people, they had been completely ignored up to this point. It was as if the NAACP branches didn't even exist, which is one of the principal reasons I contacted the New York OEO office. And so, even at the beginning of the holiday meeting, we had problems with Bingham making it clear from the outset that it wasn't necessary to discuss representation on TVCCA's governing body.

I don't know why he thought we had accepted his invitation to attend the meeting. Discussing representation on the governing body was our prime motive for attending. Each time we brought up the question of representation, Bingham would evade it. Time after time the question would be put to him, always resulting in the same evasive actions. The sparring between us lasted for about two hours until, finally, Bingham was literally forced to discuss representation on the governing body.

He revealed that some members of TVCCA said, "Negroes were trying to take over the program." I was shocked, since I had been interested in the program at a very late date. I didn't want to get involved, but there I was, angry about such a falsehood, and about to make someone else angry. I told TVCCA's representatives that "Fifty percent of the governing body should be needy people from the area which was served, and to be served." Apparently realizing how totally dissatisfied we were with the composition of the governing body, Bingham told us to gather our people from the areas to be served; then, he would get his people from the TVCCA and "make some plans for the inclusion of the poor." Bingham also told us that maybe some of TVCCA's board members were willing to resign to make room for the poor because there were only six vacancies left on the governing body. He said TVCCA had to get started immediately, as it needed funds to get the program underway. We insisted there would have to be adequate representation of the poor so they could help run the program.

Bingham agreed that adequate representation certainly would have to be achieved. With his words of assurance, we departed feeling that everything had been resolved. TVCCA led us to believe we would gather the indigent leaders for TVCCA's governing body, and TVCCA board members would meet us half way. I didn't mention the letter of protest sent to New York on May 27. In fact, I began to feel sorry that I had written it. But there was no real worry, I thought, because I still had over a week to call it off. Then, suddenly on Wednesday, June 2, a betrayal. Alfred Bingham was on the phone telling me, "New York has a letter from you."

He sounded extremely upset and I felt betrayed, realizing that New York failed to wait the two weeks as agreed upon. Betrayed as I was, I told Bingham he shouldn't be upset. NAACP was going into the areas to find people who would help get the program started. Bingham informed me that several months would be required to rectify the situation. When I assured him it wouldn't take nearly that long because we would have the people by the end of June, he explained what he meant by several months. He said that this was the amount of time it would take to convince the conservatives on his board to change their opinions, meaning that they would have to participate with the poor. He further told me that these conservatives "probably voted for Goldwater," and he realized he had made a mistake "by forming the board with all these people."

Bingham also told me that he had worked hard to get those TVCCA members to join him. Consequently, he said, he "could not ask for their resignations." He went on to say

that “these people make an impressive group” and included a banker, welfare department people, etc.—people “from the upper income bracket, who may never have known poverty but exercised tremendous influence in the community.” I told him that we could not participate in the program “until changes are made.” That’s when Bingham dropped another unexpected bombshell. He announced that he felt someone else will have to take over, and start another community action program. He told me that he felt the newly-organized TVCCA was finished. I certainly hadn’t expected such a notion.

I knew he had worked hard to get the people together, to get an organization started. I told him he shouldn’t give up because we were in the process of getting the poor people organized. By doing it that way, I told him, there would be no discrimination involved. We were signing up poor blacks and whites and we were going to split the numbers “right down the middle.” I told Bingham that I believed the government enacted the law for the poor. Bingham admitted a mistake had been made in the forming of TVCCA, but argued that if we could just get funds now, corrections would be made later. I insisted, however, that the governing body be straightened out before they acquired any funds.

Bingham rejected that idea. He would guarantee, after the funds were received, the poor would be added. I rejected his idea by telling him, “that is totally unsatisfactory because it could well be forgotten once the money was received.” I believed a substantial number of poor should be on the board to help set policy, rules, regulations, and also to select a paid staff. Bingham said that even if some of the board members are bigoted they cannot be asked to resign. After he told me this, I told him the only sensible thing to do was dissolve the present community action setup and “start from scratch.” I sent a letter to Bingham for the record, and forwarded a copy of it to Joe Dyer, Connecticut’s director of the OEO. Concerning dissolving the program, I told them that fairness necessitated that even if the board is forty-nine percent poor, the bigots he talked about “would still control the situation.” As long as they control the situation, we would find it impossible to participate. In the letter I also wrote, “They have now modified the bylaws. The modifications mean nothing to us because the end result will be the same as before.” I refuted the idea put forth that the poor are incapable of governing and understanding the problems and that, therefore, should be in the majority on subcommittees, but not serve on the governing body.

I also wrote in the letter Bingham’s exact words. He said, “The conservatives are not ready for the radical changes as the law intended.” I wrote, “Furthermore, the present structure of the TVCCA governing body consists of very few representatives of the poor, and, therefore, the plans for a Community Action Program are nullified because the majority are not representatives of the poor, or from the areas to be served.”

For someone who had attempted to keep away from another controversy, I found myself involved up to my neck. Someone else should have been doing something because I had all the pressure I could handle at the time. We had the running battle with EB, which tied us down. We had the Hebron case pending and had just become deeply involved in Fort Hill Homes a month earlier. I guess I simply didn’t know how to turn my back and run.

In trying to keep an eye on the interests of the poor, I took a seat, temporarily, on the governing body. Our branches then sent people in the field to seek out persons who met



the necessary classification of low income. At that time, to be considered, a person had to have an income under \$3,000 per year. Under some rare circumstances, \$4,000 and under classified a person as poverty-stricken.

I had been on the governing body a short time when word came through that the government deemed the community action program “fundable.” The subject of a director was raised once again. I still had my gripes, and was still not satisfied, primarily because they eliminated James Harris prior to the notice of the funding. The person seeking the directorship was Richard Brooks, a man unfamiliar to me. Politics being what it was, I found myself the lone dissenting voice. When the name of Richard Brooks was submitted for a formal vote, I had to twist the arm of one of my own board members. Our votes were only symbolic in that they were the only nays. After Brooks’ hiring, I decided to play only a small part in the business of TVCCA.

I was disenchanted with TVCCA’s hiring policies. It appeared to me that each person hired had no affiliation with any civil or human rights organizations. I thought they should have hired people who had worked for the passage of legislation that had created the “War on Poverty.” But it became quite obvious that TVCCA had its own agenda and that whatever I thought didn’t matter at all. I was quite familiar with people who had worked for the passage of vital legislation concerning poverty. Although I did not need a job, I knew people who did. But they found themselves left on the sidelines.

### **School Segregation**

During this time in the mid-1960s, my thoughts focused on the crisis of school segregation in New London. I was really thinking about two schools (Saltonstall and Harbor), but Saltonstall was foremost in my mind. Saltonstall was the first school I had attended when I arrived in New London in 1935. We lived at 73 Hempstead Street, one block from the school, which occupied three street corners: Hope, Hempstead, and Truman Streets where the school served one of the most integrated areas in the city. Back then, I knew practically everyone in the surrounding area, although many of those names I have long since forgotten. Next door was the Tortora family, with the Miller family next to them. On the other side of us was Mrs. Annie Stevenson. She was raising Dorothy Burgess, who was called “Buggsy.” Mrs. Mable Lyle and her daughter Constance also lived in the same building. Down on the corner of High Street was the Kellous Irby family. On High Street were the Browns and Turners and Goodes. On the other side of High Street was Shiloh Baptist Church, which has since been razed. I think about those years often and wonder if my perspective would have been radically different if, when I first came to New London, we had lived in another area of the city.

What my views would have been, I am not sure; but I knew what they were then. In the late 1950s, when living in another part of the city, I would constantly pass Saltonstall School. Even earlier than that, when we lived on Hope Street, the school was only a stone’s throw away. But when we moved out of the Hempstead area in the mid50s, a slow change was taking place, subtle, and hardly noticeable on the surface.

Where the change became apparent was in the rising numbers of black children in the school. With talk of the proposed redevelopment project, one could see the moving vans in front of homes in the area. It was by no means a panic, but some did not want to

wait for the bulldozer to force them out. Mostly, they were the people who felt able to make the move then. Many homeowners within the proposed project zone felt compelled to stay, especially families with little means, including homeowners and non-homeowners alike.

But living quarters that had become vacant were soon to be inhabited by other occupants seeking better residences. Some places were in excellent condition, with little or no rehabilitation necessary. The problem was that city leaders wanted to destroy the area completely. Rehabilitation of most of the homes would have created an ideal model city. But wholesale destruction was in the city's future. When talk of redevelopment gave way to the reality of redevelopment, families found themselves scurrying around other neighborhoods seeking decent living space. Sometimes people had to settle for less. If I had any inkling of how many problems would arise from the destruction of so many homes, I would have tried to find a way to keep most of the families in the area. Many families found shelter in the neighborhood of Saltonstall School. My family was one that had moved back into the Saltonstall School area and we were among those who had to seek other living quarters because there was no way to halt the wholesale demolition of our neighborhood.

Readily apparent was the fact that the school had become predominately black. Yet, even with this background, it was a difficult decision for me to become involved with the school situation. Besides having our hands in practically everything except the schools, I was rapidly running down, and getting pretty tired from our other involvements. However, I well knew that school segregation was a problem, and I thought long and hard about Saltonstall. In addition, others spoke to me about the school. In 1965, long before I decided to try for changes, I wrote a letter to the school board indicating that we were concerned with the racial composition of the schools. When I thought the proper time had arrived, I copied the letter over and re-dated it.

I have never figured out why I thought the time was proper, but I mailed the letter and waited for whatever response was forthcoming. I really expected all kinds of resistance from school officials. But to my surprise, the only overt protest came from a black teacher in the New London system. Maybe if I had heard the protest before I sent the school board the letter, it could possibly have made a difference. After I had taken that stand, however, and made my intentions known, it was too late for any teacher to oppose it.

The school board quickly acknowledged the letter. We tried to take steps to assure the board and public that the idea of desegregating the schools would not result in a massive upheaval. Since the junior and senior high schools were not a problem, we had two less schools to be concerned with. All other schools, with the possible exception of Edgerton, were our main concerns. The only thing I feared was getting mired in protracted discussions. We were quick to offer all the assistance possible, meeting with the board often and trying to make the changes as painless as possible.

What I detected early on was that Dr. Joseph Medeiros, superintendent of schools, favored the idea of redistricting. I was happy that he was the superintendent at the time because we needed a friend with some influence, and it turned out that he was that friend. In a conversation after redistricting, Dr. Medeiros told me the board had been thinking all

along about making such a move. He said, "Redistricting was part of our future plans anyway." Medeiros said he knew, as did the other members, that a change had to take place. "We were certainly working to those ends," he said.

Although not formulated to evolve as it did, as long as I can remember, the school board, and not the NAACP, took the bulk of the criticism. This was a pleasant surprise. Thinking back on it now, the reason I didn't take on the problem of desegregation earlier could have been the friction that I anticipated. I knew if officials resisted, we would be in all sorts of trouble because to concentrate on the school issues, we would have had to concentrate less on EB, the poverty program, and other areas of civil rights in which we were so deeply involved. Since we encountered little opposition, we were able, at our own pace, to focus more on the school de facto segregation issue. Though I decided it was the proper time to submit my letter regarding desegregation, I still was not fully ready to tackle the issue. My actions came as a surprise to our board members; most of them, however, responded, adjusting quickly to what was ahead. Mrs. Anita Winston, education chairman, and Clarence Faulk were called upon to submit a plan to end de facto segregation.

That I was not ready to tackle the job was, perhaps, a mild way of saying we needed a lot of help. As we never sat down and discussed plans or strategy, we had no real insight into what we could expect. Mrs. Winston was caught off balance, as was Clarence Faulk. I did not like shoving something such as the desegregation issue in front of someone with inadequate notice. I realized, however, that nothing was going to happen in a week. I hoped that Faulk and Mrs. Winston could put everything else on hold and cram their brains full of desegregation knowledge. But I also knew the chance of their doing this was remote. It wasn't that they were incapable. I was being realistic. Both had personal obligations that came before their voluntary considerations.

When I called attention to the black-white ratio at Saltonstall School, the black school population was increasing. This lopsided trend caused me to issue a press statement. "We are concerned about all of the city's schools, in relation to the segregation problem. But when we get down to specifics, Saltonstall and Harbor Schools head the list." Because Saltonstall School was already sixty-five percent black, and because redevelopment uprooted more minorities, there was a good chance the school's black population would soon be seventy-five to eighty percent, definitely trending toward an all-black school. "Harbor School is two percent nonwhite, which indicates it will become an all-white school."

I argued that children of all races should be taught together from kindergarten upwards. In that way, they would understand each other better than if they suddenly were to meet in junior high or high school. I felt that a great many misunderstandings could be averted if all the schools were integrated. When the initial letter was sent to the school board, I had no idea where our stand on desegregation would lead. All I knew was that we were in that arena of the civil rights fight, and we had to be ready for the future. Attorney Matthew Shafner, to prepare for the eventualities, journeyed to New York and conferred with June Shagaloff, the NAACP National Education Chair.

As a result of his discussions, Shafner was able to articulate our views on de facto segregation. After meeting with Shagaloff, the citizens advisory council in New London

invited him to a debate. Shafner debated Robert C. Weller (school board member) and the president of Mitchell College. The local school board voted earlier in favor of neighborhood schools; however, we doubted that neighborhood schools were in our best interest. Both Shafner and Weller agreed that New London never had neighborhood schools, and the city probably never would. This idea conflicted directly with the way the school board had voted in the past. Shafner strongly advanced the thesis that "any school that serves a population as diverse as those in New London cannot be considered a neighborhood school." Weller replied that "I have no quarrel with your opinion because you are perfectly correct."

New London already had Saltonstall, Harbor, Winthrop, Nameaug, Jennings, Waller, and Little Red Schoolhouse elementary schools. To remedy the segregation problem, the school board suggested that, additionally, the city build two small primary schools. Since the NAACP wanted fewer and larger schools, Shafner countered that, "Three large elementary schools in this city, an area of 6.3 square miles, would be sufficient." He continued, insisting that "Larger schools have all the advantages of smaller schools with one important distinction. Racial balance is easier to maintain." He also reiterated that "Racial imbalance, in itself, is harmful to the majority as well as the minority." Using a copy of a special report by the Civil Rights Commission, Shafner quoted from a number of studies that showed the harm of racial imbalance.

Weller took issue because the report did not "apply to New London because the study was not done in New London." Weller countered with a publication called *The Reporter*. He said that a woman by the name of Greenfield took issue with the report. Greenfield thought that the Civil Rights Commission's special report "was not valid." Weller did not believe that any New London student would be short changed educationally, and he received support from Superintendent Medeiros. Medeiros said, "No student, including students coming from Saltonstall School, has fared any less when they entered junior high or high school." Medeiros made no mention of whether students succeeded or failed in the following years.

The debate eventually reached the subject of delaying school construction. Shafner suggested the delay. Attorney George Kanabis offered the proposal that new schools should be delayed until "a more extensive study can be made concerning the schools." Weller responded that the city needed new schools because the ones in place were "inadequate." Weller believed that "legally and morally we, as Board of Education members, are meeting our responsibility."

Resistance probably would have been greater had the board opposed our overtures in the beginning. Forty parents did file a petition of protest against our stand; however, they said that their protest was not racial. One parent indicated that "De facto segregation has nothing to do with it." In short, the parents said that "We, the people of this area, do not want our children to attend Saltonstall School." White citizens knew what was going on at Saltonstall. We also knew. Black children at Saltonstall were being taught in the basement. White parents wanted their children sent to Harbor and Edgerton Schools. The NAACP wanted black children at those schools as well.

A meeting was called at Saltonstall School for the purpose of alleviating the fears of black and white parents, many of whom felt that the school was inferior. The city allowed

parents to tour the building. But parents still believed that the general neighborhood was a terrible place for a school. The NAACP and many parents argued against the new school in the fifth ward. But NAACP members knew that de facto segregation wouldn't end overnight, that we needed studies, and that suggestions for redistricting frightened white parents.

At a special meeting in August 1966, Weller presented an in-depth report on integration. There were several aspects of the report I disliked. He related our view for a totally integrated school system but eventually indicated that we seemed to be wavering. The national was taking another look at school integration; however, I could not see us making any drastic changes. We certainly were not going to change our stance locally. Since we didn't have a number of all-black and all-white schools, we didn't need to worry about massive transfers of students city and county wide. The board did agree to hire a social planner to aid in the redistricting problems, but I quickly realized our dilemma. While our problems were minor in comparison to other areas of the state, it would take time to hire a social planner. The planner would initiate studies and make recommendations that would eventually have to be accepted by the school. Next, the plans would have to be accepted by the city council. In all likelihood, I would be out of office by then.

The school board called for a plan to reduce the number of black students in Saltonstall by ten percent. They believed such a reduction would cut down on overcrowding. The school's rising black population would then level out at sixty-three percent. However, we were against a white-black student population of fifty-fifty; therefore, sixty-three percent was totally unsatisfactory.

White parents and NAACP leaders continued to exchange opposing complaints. Parents believed that transfers were too large, while the NAACP said that more students needed to be moved. Shafner wrote that redistricting plans failed to meet NAACP approval, and, in addition, our lawyer asserted that "redistricting will not appreciably reduce de facto segregation at Saltonstall School." Someone even suggested double sessions; however, Medeiros opposed double sessions. Personally, I took a hands-off approach because the school board was working somewhat along our line of thinking.

When I left office, the city completed building Nathan Hale School. Eventually, the city abandoned Saltonstall and Nameaug, and redistricting became somewhat of a reality. We had started the trend toward desegregation. But the situation needed vigilant monitoring in subsequent years. Ultimately, housing patterns and white flight led to a rebirth of de facto segregation.

### **Black Minstrels and Birth of a Nation: 1966-67**

While de facto segregation slowly reappeared, minstrel shows and *Birth of a Nation* also re-emerged as problems. While New London's NAACP had dealt with minstrel shows during past administrations, my own administration found itself addressing this problem again. Minstrels were major draws in the area. The Knights of Columbus ceased the events in 1924 but revived the minstrels in 1936. The Knights packed the Garde Theater, their crowd numbering over 1000. EB held its first minstrel show in 1936, an event that drew over 600 people at Bulkeley Senior High School on Huntington Street. Groups such

as “Black White Minstrel Club” specifically formed for such events. The only purpose of such groups was to make money through what can only be called anti-social and mimicking performances. It astounded me that black people took part in the events, but they did. Many of the participants, black and white, grew up in an era of racism that deemed such activity acceptable. The NAACP saw things quite differently: the shows were an ill-conceived affront to well meaning people of all races. Organizers aimed to draw crowds and make people laugh by denigrating black people, who bore the brunt of the demeaning comedy.

The interlocutor and end-men were the heart and soul of the minstrel shows. However, the NAACP believed that variety programs without the interlocutor and end-men would equal or even outdraw a minstrel show. With a variety program, everyone could attend.

In addition, we challenged the showing of the racist *Birth of a Nation*, a classic silent film that introduced new cinematography and which had a deadly, dark, and serious side. The producers based the film on *The Clansman*, a book by Thomas Dixon, a white, racist minister. Dixon’s novel described the Ku Klux Klan as heroically saving the poor prostrate South from ignorant blacks, unscrupulous carpetbaggers, and back-stabbing scalawags. The film was filled with negative characterizations of blacks. Whenever we found this film or minstrels, we made our feelings and objections known. As I mentioned earlier, we protested a minstrel production in November 1961 at the urgings of President Norma Albright.

In 1966, our seasoned demonstrators confronted the Stonington Historical Society about showing *Birth of a Nation*. Not only were they going to show the picture, but they chose February for the screening, the time when “Negro” History Week, later African American History Month, occurred. Captain R.J. Ramsbotham, president of the Stonington Historical Society, received a letter of protest from the New London and Norwich branches of the NAACP. The Town of Stonington, Stonington Board of Education, and Stonington High School also received protest letters. Following this, the board of education in Stonington met and went on record opposing the showing of *Birth of a Nation*. The issue played out in the following manner.

Hoping that our combined forces would make an impact, the Norwich NAACP president and I purposely appeared at the meeting of the school board. We tried to impress upon the board the need to renegotiate the contract with the historical society, but we were told that it was too late to enter into re-negotiations. The showing of the film was a done deal. Norwich’s President Rucker and I cited incidents of racial conflicts that followed the viewing of the picture in past years. We used *Showbiz*, a book that revealed such conflicts, as proof. Authors Abel Green and Joe Laurie, Jr., described the film as “a strange work of art.”

It undeniably advanced the technique of film making to its highest level for that day; but it was vicious propaganda, worthy of the Kaiser’s latter day successor. It stirred up racial hatred against the Negro. Green and Laurie went on to say, “It glorified the Ku Klux Klan, sowing seed for the revival of Klan atrocities which actually took place in the two years following World War I.” After reading the passages, I informed the board: “The picture is only a glorification of the Klan, which strongly suggests they, the Klan,

are saviors of the South's white minority from its black majority." I also told the board that the picture was "strongly offensive to a large population of Connecticut residents." And furthermore, "the picture, stressing such strong hatred, is not the type which needs to be shown here." To the NAACP, *Birth of a Nation* represented inflammatory hatred and contempt. And it "carried a special defamation of black people." Following our presentation, one board member asked: "Does it mean picketing the school if we are not able to cancel the picture?"

Although I wasn't anticipating such a question, I returned a stern answer, "It definitely does mean that." Although the board members didn't do it in our presence, they voted to oppose the showing. With the vote of opposition, we felt we had a chance to stop the showing of the film. The next round of discussions and debates over the film involved conferences between the board of education and the Stonington Historical Society. The two groups didn't invite us; however, we received a letter from President Ramsbotham, which said in part, "The Stonington Historical Society does not desire to be the cause, regardless of how innocently, of any controversy in this area, which up to now has been free of such distasteful incidents."

They canceled the film, replacing *Birth of a Nation* with a series of old-time movies. We sent a signed letter of thanks including a small donation. A portion of our letter said, "I hope, in our time, these pictures can be shown and viewed objectively without controversy. I am sure, on March 11, 1966, there will be NAACP members in the audience who, as a matter of principle, would not have been there if this film had been shown." The NAACP thanked the Stonington Historical Society for its "thoughtful and courageous actions," and wished them "all the luck in the world in your efforts to restore the Whitehall Mansion." It's funny, but I don't think either Stonington faction would have believed me if I had given my personal feelings. That is, I honestly believed them when they said the picture was being shown for historical purposes. Nothing indicated they had any other intention. The historical society of Stonington reluctantly canceled *Birth of a Nation* because of our insistence. We were grateful.

On February 20, 1966, the speaker for our sixth Annual Negro History Week Program was Dr. John Morsell, assistant director of the National NAACP. His speech established our course regarding future showings of *Birth of a Nation*. He delivered a powerful and memorable speech:

*This movie is based on a novel by Thomas Dixon, a white minister who entitled the book, The Clansman. And in the book, Reverend Dixon embodied all of his tortured prejudices against people of color.*

*He [Dixon] acknowledged to someone who interviewed him at the time, that he wrote it in the interest of establishing, once and for all, the supremacy of white people over black people, and that he honestly and sincerely believed they were superior, and he wanted to do everything he could to promote that idea. D.W. Griffith liked the novel and made a movie out of it.*

*I'm told that Birth of a Nation is a kind of landmark in movie-making history. In it, Griffith introduced certain new techniques in film-making.*

*He apparently was very imaginative and creative in his use of large numbers of people. I'm told that the battle scenes are some of the greatest battle scenes that have ever been filmed. There are various other techniques. So, as a historical element in the progress of making the film, Birth of a Nation, presumably, still has a place to be reviewed by students of film. And by others, concerned in a professional way with the techniques and development of movie-making, regardless of its content.*

Morsell believed that Dixon designed the novel as a “naked appeal to racists.” The NAACP fought against the showing of the movie beginning with its release in 1915. The organization proved successful in getting some of the showing curtailed. We continued that protest tradition in New London County. Morsell outlined legitimate reasons for viewing the movie. He said:

*As long as it is not a group of students who have legitimate reasons, as I've outlined, for looking at it for technical reasons, people who want to show it ought to be required to demonstrate that they are showing it in good faith. They can do this in only one way, by showing Birth of a Nation as a horrible example of how history can be distorted.*

*By doing it in that fashion, and by arranging to have it accompanied by material, both in print and orally, that exposes its distortions and falsehoods. This is a position NAACP branches can take without any questions being raised as to censorship. Make it clear that you don't want to stop anyone from seeing anything, but if it is going to be for public view, its true nature ought to be known to those who come to see it.*

The national NAACP leader stated that “incidentally, it is really ridiculous that an historical society would want to show the *Birth of a Nation* as a contribution to history, and yet not plan to show, at the same time, how badly it was misleading on what actually happened.” He was establishing that a sense of history was necessary. Many parents didn't know enough black history to tell their children even the simplest things during Negro History Week. Morsell provided an excellent example of distorted history with his Richard III example. He grew up believing that England's Richard III was one of the greatest villains of all time. He later learned from historians that his beliefs were incorrect, that it was Henry VII who took Richard's throne and historically vilified him.

Morsell spoke about how blacks had been vilified historically, as well. He informed the audience about how in history books, blacks were frequently referred to as inferior. Lies were written about slavery and Reconstruction. To the audience in 1966, Morsell also said, “They don't tell you there were hundreds of revolts by slaves against the slave system.” The myth that blacks were lazy and docile was easily perpetuated over the years. Morsell said, “Negroes had another way of resisting slavery, which was simply by not cooperating with the system. So they did break tools and equipment; they did damage machinery, and they did malingering whenever they thought they could get away with it.”

His assertions about Reconstruction struck a resounding chord. *Birth of a Nation*, in its depiction of the Reconstruction, was particularly disturbing; further, Morsell informed those in attendance that books such as *The Tragic Era* described black people as



*[S]emi-savage, ignorant Negroes who were freed from the plantations; were exploited by Northern white politicians; and were put into the legislatures where they sat around with their feet on the desks; and with their hats on smoking expensive cigars; spitting on the floor, and that they engaged in general persecution of white people. Yet the truth of the matter is entirely different in that, most of the Negroes elected to legislatures were men of ability. Nearly all could read and write. And not only that, they had some very simple notion about how their state should be run.*

Morsell continued to discuss Reconstruction in his speech by stressing that it was not a case of "Negro Rule." "In only one state did Negroes hold a majority, and that was in South Carolina where they controlled the lower house of the legislature," he said, adding that black legislators also "sponsored legislation of which a whole lot is still on the books." Black legislators established the first free public education in South Carolina. Misinformation was used to "justify unequal treatment." Morsell let the audience know that we had a long way to go in refuting notions of black inferiority. Our speaker put to rest the notion that "Negroes should help themselves." He said, "I know of no instance, in all recorded history, that is more concrete, a more nobler demonstration of self-help than Negro Americans have provided since they were first brought to these shores." He spoke of tradesmen, school teachers, and school builders, who were black. He did not forget the white teachers who aided in educational efforts. He concluded his speech with a discussion of the struggle of black people in a rapidly developing nation. On this struggle, he emphasized:

*The fact is that Negroes are constantly playing a game of catch-up. And that they have got to play the game faster and faster because the kinds of development in technology, and investments and the like, are working against progress that are wiping out these unskilled jobs at a rate of a million jobs a year.*

Dr. Morsell suggested we change our tactics on minstrels and the movie. And we got the opportunity to use the new tactics less than a month later. On March 9, 1966, Connecticut College Film Society scheduled a showing of *Birth of a Nation*. Dr. Jane Torrey negotiated with the film society for time to address the audience before the showing. We prepared for all eventualities by hiding our picket signs on the college campus. They were ready if needed; happily, they were not needed. The headlines in the *Hartford Courant* read "Teacher Hits Film *Birth of a Nation* Shown At College." The article read:

*The NAACP-condemned movie, The Birth of a Nation, was shown at Connecticut College Palmer Auditorium here Wednesday night, but not before it was blasted by a faculty member. Dr. Jane Torrey, a psychology professor, and assistant secretary of the New London NAACP chapter, got on stage before the lights dimmed and attacked the picture as "an inexcusable distortion, both of the ideal of American life and the simple facts of Reconstruction history." Dr. Torrey, who was accompanied by Linwood Bland, Jr., president of the NAACP chapter, said later she was given permission to speak by Miss Diana Rabenold, president of the college film society.*

*Both Bland and Dr. Torrey said they had intended to picket the showing of the film, which has been attacked by the National NAACP as glorifying the Ku Klux Klan, but decided against it when Dr. Torrey got permission to speak to about two hundred forty persons in the audience. Several NAACP members waited in the lobby as Dr. Torrey spoke.*

*Miss Rabenold told reporters that although she "deplored the content of the picture," made by D.W. Griffith in 1915, it had been booked because it "blazed a new trail" in motion picture techniques.*

*In her address to the audience, Dr. Torrey said, "I come to protest this film and not to see it or censure it. I would have done you a better favor had I stood outside with a large sign and urged you not to waste your time and your money as I would also do if this were to have been a black-faced minstrel show or an address by George Lincoln Rockwell.*

*The only possible legitimate reason for showing or preserving it, it is a milestone in the history of film art. The film asserts that Negro legislators and public officials were ignorant and corrupt. Actually they were mostly educated men, as can be seen by the speeches they made ... the film depicts the rise of the Klan as the work of a desperate majority of embattled whites defending their womanhood against rapacious blacks."*

*According to Dr. Torrey, the film shows the Klan founder as a "virtuous man avenging the rape" of his little sister. "In fact, the Klan's founder was involved in a mass murder of a predominantly Negro crowd during the Civil War in which persons inside a captured fort were shot in cold blood, buried alive, nailed to trees and set afire. This included women and children."*

*"Some of you," she concluded, "will go home this evening disgusted and shocked, but it is not you who will be harmed by it. My protest is on behalf of those who will not be shocked, who will find nothing offensive in the picture beyond the aesthetical inadequacies and naive emotionalism of The Klansman as the picture was originally entitled."*

*Dr. Torrey was roundly applauded. The New London branch NAACP several weeks ago protested the intended showing of Birth of a Nation by the Stonington Historical Society at Mystic High School. After receiving the complaints, the society cancelled the showing.*

The controversial film was shown several weeks later in Willimantic, at Willimantic State Teachers College. The Norwich NAACP was allowed to speak before the film was shown. The *Courant* erred in its statement about picketing at Mystic High School. *Birth of a Nation* was scheduled for Stonington High School. We would also protest the scheduled singing of the song "Dixie" and presence of a Confederate flag at one of New London's elementary schools. The school withdrew the song and flag from its program. Our efforts at curtailing discrimination in public events proved successful; however, I soon found myself at work outside of New London.

## Voting, A Major Breakthrough

After all this time, I am more convinced than ever that had a person of color been nominated for a seat on the New London Board of Education or New London city council in 1964, an easy victory would have resulted. 1964 was the year for highest black voter turnout in city history. This fact was headlined in our monthly NAACP newsletter, *The New London Conscience*. The headline and story read:

### *New London Negroes Out-Vote Whites*

*Information received by the branch's Political Action Chairman, Jane W. Torrey, indicates that the Negro turnout exceeded the white turnout on election day. About 85% of the eligible New London voters cast their ballots on November 3.*

*"Among Negro voters," according to Miss Torrey, "the percentage was closer to 90%."*

The article further stated:

*In the fourth ward, Henry Greene, NAACP ward captain, reports that "209 out of 218 eligible Negro voters went to the polls." In the fifth ward, only three out of 81 Negroes failed to vote. In an effort to get out the vote, more than 15 members of the branch drove cars, telephoned, and rang doorbells to make sure no Negro voters were forgotten. Among those participating in this were: Philip Jordan, Mrs. Gerald Guthrie, Mrs. Mary Kent, Ms. Edith Berry, Mrs. Anita Winston, Mr. and Mrs. Philip Goldberg. Also participating were: Mr. and Mrs. Sheldon Ebenholtz, Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Schlesinger, Ms. Louise Matthews and Mrs. Lila Cohen.*

*There were others who participated, but those named spent the day driving voters back and forth. "Those volunteer workers found," according to Torrey, "that Negro voters needed no persuading." She also noted that: "enthusiasm for the election brought most of them to the polls on their own steam." "In summing up the registration and Get-out-the-vote drives," Torrey noted that the role of her committee was mostly limited to reminding and informing voters. "The real credit for the success," she said, "lies with those who registered and voted. Our work would have come to much less if it had not been that American Negroes realized this year, more than ever before, that they hold the real balance of power in their hands. They were determined to make their voices heard," she concluded.*

This is why I am confident when I say, had a black been nominated in 1964, there would have been few problems getting the black elected. I don't think, given the turnout, there would have been any way a black person would have lost that election. And what's more, the machinery is still basically in place. All it takes is for someone to oil it up and put it into motion again.

The Star Democratic Club was in existence during this time in 1964. It was publicly claimed that the Star Democratic Club had over 500 members and they were overwhelmingly black. A lot of people questioned the numbers, which, they said, were exaggerated for political purposes. I have no idea how many belonged. But inflated or not, there was quite a large number. The Star Democratic Club was headed by Seymour Manheimer, a white member of the Democratic Town Committee. The club was organized in the late 1950s or early '60s. It was to flourish for nearly ten years.

The Star Democratic Club, coupled with the NAACP's well-oiled machine, was a future godsend. Over the years, beginning in 1963, the NAACP had registered many voters. Much of the credit for registering these voters must be given to Dr. Jane Torrey. Her committee members were ever busy. When election time came during the 1960s, those registered voters made their presence felt. The basics are still in place to this day. It really surprises me that no one has tapped this reservoir of political strength and put it to good use. Had I been an aspirant for political office, I certainly would have knocked on those doors.

To give an example of minority political strength, I have to speak of what happened in 1943, as opposed to what had happened a quarter century later. The Colored Men's Progressive Club pushed for Reverend A.A. Garvin to get involved in the political scene. In 1943, Reverend Garvin was nominated to run for the New London Board of Education. Blacks were organized as best they could be, but they had neither the numbers, nor the machinery that the NAACP had in the 1960s. Without numbers or machinery, and with a fear of reprisals from white employers, the Progressive Club members already had three strikes against them. I can't even say Reverend Garvin made a strong showing in his first and last attempt at a political office. I wish I could, but the fact is, he was soundly defeated. What I can say with accuracy is that even though he was soundly defeated, his entrance into the political field was a major victory.

Reverend Garvin, a black neophyte, set the stage for other blacks to enter races for seats as selectmen, city councilors and board of education members. The proof is evidenced by what occurred years after Reverend Garvin tossed his hat in the ring. William H. Baum was nominated to run for the board of selectmen; David Small was nominated to run for the board of education; Spencer Lancaster was nominated to run for the board of selectmen and, later, was nominated to run for the city council. Ernest Kydd, Jr., was nominated to run for the city council. Additionally, George Lytle was nominated to run for board of selectmen; Roy E. Sebastian was nominated to run for the board of education; Leo Jackson was nominated to run for the city council; Mrs. Eunice Waller was nominated to run for the board of education and, also, for the city council; and Bob Peters was nominated to run for the city council. Moreover, whereas Reverend Garvin was the first black ever to be nominated for a political position, Spencer Lancaster was the first ever to attain a seat.

Of those mentioned prior to the late 1960s, only Kydd found the odds in his favor for a major political office. I have for years referred to Kydd's participation in the political process as the year of the major breakthrough. He had thrown his hat into the political ring and was nominated to run for the city council in 1969. He was victorious. As far as I know, Ernest Kydd was the first black ever to be nominated to run for a seat on the city council and to succeed.

Because NAACP members formed an alliance with the Hispanic community, Kydd had an excellent chance to become New London's first black councilman. As a rule, the NAACP did not endorse candidates for political office. We broke that rule occasionally, but I disliked this practice. I was glad I wasn't president of the NAACP when Kydd was seeking office. I could never have participated in his campaign the way I did. I teamed up with Louis Atherton, at the time an influential leader of the Hispanic community. Together we knocked on doors and kept the telephones busy. Voters that the NAACP was responsible for registering and educating during my presidency were to make their presence felt. With Atherton and other Spanish-speaking residents leading the Hispanic community and with NAACP members spearheading the black community and making certain that minorities went to the polls, Ernest Kydd, Jr., was swept into office—the first black ever to be elected to one of New London's highest political positions.

It wasn't easy being the first black on the council. So many things didn't go the way Kydd wanted. I can imagine he wanted to make a good showing and to indicate, especially to minorities, that he would not be the typical rubber stamp councilor as previous councilors were reported to have been. There was a good deal of infighting, and sometimes it caused Kydd a lot of aggravation. His desire to bring about positive change was met with one frustration after another. During his tenure, the ordeals led him to consider resigning. We talked about the possibility of his stepping down, but I opposed the idea. I remembered how hard we had worked to get him elected. It was unfortunate that he met with so many setbacks, especially since he truly wanted to show the community that he didn't believe in the status quo. However, he was to find out how difficult it was for one individual to make any headway. Notwithstanding his heartbreaks and frustrations, had he chosen to seek another term, I felt sure he would have had no problem being reelected. But, Kydd was so devastated and demoralized, he relinquished his seat in 1971.

Following in Kydd's footsteps as councilors were Leo Jackson, Mrs. Eunice Waller, Mrs. Jane Glover, William Cornish, and Ernest Hewett. Mrs. Waller had previously been elected to a seat on the New London Board of Education, as was Mrs. Glover. In the 1960s, minority rule held that no political party could occupy all seats. The three Democrats, running for seats as selectmen, out-pollled the Republicans. But Lancaster, being the top vote-getter among Republicans, was seated because of the minority rule. Following the departure of Ernest Kydd, another first took place. Leo Jackson became the first black mayor of a major New England city. In the late 1980s, the Reverend Wade Hyslop demonstrated that black people could have a political presence in New London County. He became the first black in the New London area elected to the House of Representatives. He was following in the footsteps of a trend which had begun earlier with the push for voting rights.

The national civil rights movement entered a phase which stressed the need to vote. Gary, Indiana, elected the first black mayor of a northern city. And the Voting Rights Act of 1965 opened the doors for greater black participation in voting in the South. Also, by 1966, the seeds of black power re-cultivated by the young philosophical followers of Malcolm X, bloomed throughout the country. In addition, white violence against civil rights workers reached its zenith during this leg of my presidency. This pressure sapped my strength. Yet, the most shocking news of my civil rights career was still yet to come.

# NINE

## The Pain of 1968

*Though the struggle continued, we did have newly passed legislation  
dealing with employment, public accommodations,  
voting rights, and housing.*

**M**y civil rights work took a tremendous toll on both my body and my emotions. The constant struggle and pressure to end discrimination in southeastern Connecticut severely wore me down. I never knew that six years of struggle could weigh so heavily on a person. We experienced victories, pain, and defeat; however, it seemed as if the "heather was on fire" in 1968.

Sometime in the mid 1960s, I had the pleasure of meeting with Captain Walter A. McGuinness. The captain was the commanding officer of the United States Naval Submarine Base in Groton. I was surprised when he visited me. I believe Clarence Faulk played a part in getting the captain to come into New London. Otherwise, the meeting would have been at the sub base. In any event, the captain had things on his mind that he felt were highly significant and important enough to share with us. My contact with naval personnel was not new. I had attempted to encourage a navy man to join the NAACP during my earlier days in the organization. He told me that naval regulations prohibited his joining. I found that hard to believe. I wanted a written confirmation, so I sent a letter to the Naval Bureau in Washington, DC, asking about such a policy. The answer was that the Navy had no policy prohibiting sailors from joining the organization. We had had a number of service members in the past and that letter opened the door to many more.

Captain McGuinness was sympathetic to our cause. He told me he had recently come from an area where racial strife was prevalent. He said that he had been unaware of any racial undercurrents when he assumed his last command; consequently, he had walked unknowingly into racial discord. As a result, he said, he had an awful time rectifying the situation. Given this experience, he wanted us to know that he would be available, should any racial problems arise among naval personnel under his command. I really appreciated his calling on us to make his position known. I doubted we would ever have to call on him because of any racial problems. I assumed if an occasion arose, it was something that would occur on the base. Then the navy would handle it. Captain McGuinness stressed, "No matter what you hear racially that involves navy men, I will be available to hear it." I could think of only one incident and that had occurred about three years earlier, so I didn't even mention it. I honestly told him I didn't expect ever to call on him.

In July 1967, a phone call from Julia Lewis proved me wrong. The caller was the wife of Bain Lewis, a petty officer serving as a shore patrolman. In that era, a black shore patrolman was a rarity. Because of that fact I knew who Lewis was, but I wasn't acquainted with him. Superiors had removed Lewis from the shore patrol square. His wife felt that the removal was a result of discrimination. Lewis, when not on shore patrol

duty, held a part-time civilian job. I thought the case was a navy issue and relayed the complaint to Clarence Faulk, who had a civil service job on the base. One of the a few times I had dealt with naval officials was when Faulk, himself, had filed a complaint of discrimination and I had gone with him to the hearing. Now, I briefed Faulk on the Bain Lewis situation. Assuming a naval investigation into the events, I never did the routine check to try to discover the reason for his dismissal.

Faulk called Captain McGuinness about the Lewis dismissal and, as I directed, emphasized that the shore patrol was all white. The captain, evidently cutting red tape, immediately restored Lewis to the squad. As I have said, I disregarded our normal procedure. I also did no follow up to make sure all was well in the Bain Lewis matter. I felt that Captain McGuinness was in control of the situation. A lot of routine things slipped in that case. Because of the nature of our involvement in that matter, neither Faulk nor I ever made an official report to the organization. Therefore, the case was never recorded in the NAACP records.

I would catch a glimpse of Lewis from time to time. With a local policeman, he normally made rounds of bars frequented by servicemen. I had almost forgotten about Lewis when, early in 1968, I heard a local newscast on the radio. It mentioned Bain Lewis. According to the radio, Lewis had saved a policeman's life the night before. I immediately thought of the events of July 1967. What would have happened if Captain McGuinness had not been a sensitive man? What would have happened if we were not able to pull some strings? What would have happened if there were no Bain Lewis? I felt good knowing the organization probably played a huge part in the episode.

The policeman involved was John Burke, a supernumerary, working part time. He was grappling with a man who had snatched the purses of two women. In the struggle, the man managed to get Burke's gun from the holster. Burke was lying flat on his stomach on the floor. The purse-snatcher was pointing the gun at the officer's back and trying to pull the trigger. Injured from an automobile accident and wearing a neck brace, Bain Lewis saved his partner. Lewis later told me, "It really was a scary situation. All I could hear was people screaming. I went down on my knees to try to help my partner." *The Day* reported that Lewis prevented the gun from being fired by putting his finger between the trigger and the trigger guard. Lewis kept his finger in that position until help arrived, and the purse-snatcher could be subdued. For his efforts, Lewis received a commendation from Captain McGuinness, the New London City Council, and the National Police Officers Association.

I had never been interested in speaking with Burke, but about twenty years after the incident, I felt a compelling need to tell Burke the complete Bain Lewis story. Burke had left law enforcement in 1970 and I traced him to Hartford where he was now living and working. I was sure there were things of which he had no knowledge, particularly of how the NAACP was approached by Captain McGuinness during the early stages of his submarine base command. And the important results that followed.

## **We Lost This One**

In early February 1968, within a few days of the time that Bain Lewis was honored for his heroics, my schedule called for me to go to New Haven. I planned to leave around

6:45pm. In mid-afternoon, Rev. Garvin came to see me at my job. I knew his visit was important because the only other time he had consulted with me at work was after the bombing of Birmingham's 16th Street Baptist Church. Rev. Garvin told me there was a black woman stranded at the railroad station. This meant little to me until he explained why she was stranded. "She was run out of Groton by the Groton Police," he said. He had not seen the young woman, but someone had called him to tell him about her problem. I questioned Rev. Garvin about the circumstances. He stated, "I haven't seen her myself, Brother Bland, but the person who called me is pretty truthful." I didn't know what to say. I knew I couldn't just walk off the job and go to the station. He suggested someone go to pick her up. I told him it was a good idea, but I could not think of anyone and he agreed to arrange for the stranded woman to be taken to my house.

I met her at my home after work. It looked to me like she was in her thirties, although I am not the best judge of a person's age. My mother had fed her while she was waiting for me. It was obvious she had been crying. She was scared out of her wits. I wanted to know who had called the reverend. She said she didn't know because a lot of people came to her in the station. She said they all seemed concerned and wanted to know why she was crying. The lady talked about the police so much, I honestly thought it was the extent of her problems. Sometime later, she told me why she was in Groton. I looked at the clock at that point and realized my trip to New Haven would have to be postponed. "I was glad to get out of New York," she said, "but those people (Groton workers and police) made me feel like I was down South." She began to weep during her talk. "Never been treated like this in New York," she said, "everybody talks about how bad New York is. Well, I'll take New York over Connecticut any day." She produced a paper that contained the name of a New York employment agency. The paper also contained the name of the agency's manager. "He bought my ticket for me and I was supposed to pay him back," she said.

I told her to forget about paying the man back and not to worry, because I was going to call him the next morning. She told me she was glad she didn't get the job because, "I wouldn't want to work for people like that." It may seem strange for me to say it, but I was glad she felt that way. We really had no case. If there was ever any case at all, it was lost long before we became involved. The lady wasn't a local resident, and even if she had been, it's doubtful we could have convinced her to accept the job if we successfully negotiated for her. The police incident was another matter. It would have probably been the key item in a case filled with mistakes.

As I uncovered the details, I realized that the woman had been exploited and discriminated against in her job search. The New York employment agency had a contract with a Groton motel. The motel would call the agency and request it to send a person to fill an empty position, such as maid or groundskeeper. The agency sent this woman to fill a position. The agency manager knew that she was penniless and he purchased a one-way train ticket to New London. She agreed to repay the manager for the ticket. In addition, she agreed to pay the agency for securing her the job. The agency manager told her she would have to take a bus or taxi to Groton and she borrowed this fare from her landlord.

She said she arrived in New London in early afternoon, hailed a cab, and taxied to Groton. She said she barely had enough money to pay the driver. She was very happy



when she had arrived at her new job without incident. She went inside and told the motel personnel that she was the new employee sent by the agency. She was told there were no openings at the motel. She presented the employment agency's paper to an individual at the desk. The individual read the paper and handed it back to the lady. "We don't have any openings," she was told, "and we don't know when we will have one." Later, motel personnel confirmed this. The lady did not believe the motel personnel and she and the motel desk worker exchanged heated words. As a result, the black woman was told to leave the premises. She said she was going to "stay until someone put me to work."

"Where can I go?" she asked. "I used all of my money to get here." The white female motel worker admitted that the black woman said that to her. During the exchange, the black woman stated that she was told by the white woman, "You can go to hell as far as I'm concerned. But you had better get your black ass out of here before I call the police." The white female worker later denied making the statement.

While the black worker continued to relate her ordeal, Clarence Faulk arrived. She said, "I didn't believe they would call the police. And if they did, I would show them my employment papers." She apparently thought showing the police the papers somehow would help her to get the job. At least, the police might realize that she had a legitimate reason to be at the motel. The police ushered the black woman out of the motel.

I followed up the black woman's complaint with a visit to the Groton City Police station. I spoke with the chief to find out what I could do about the police connection. He said, "I sent one of my men. He hasn't been in the department very long, but he's a good man." The officer who was sent to the motel was at the station when I arrived; however, the hierarchy refused to let me talk to him. Instead, they gave me his written report for review. The report contained many misspelled words, and was otherwise poorly written. I had a lot of trouble deciphering the report. In my work, I had seen many poorly written police reports. The police station had dispatched the officer to the motel to answer a disturbance call. The officer confronted the complainant. The same white worker I spoke about earlier told him the black woman was boisterous. This woman also said, "We just can't have her here creating a scene. She says she is from New York, and maybe she is, but we don't want her here."

According to the report, the police officer acted quickly. His report said, "I asked the lady to leave the premises, and watched her as she walked towards the highway." The female job seeker had a somewhat more graphic and different version of the events. "He didn't put his hands on me. But he sure put his mouth on me," she said. "He used the word Nigger. And get your black ass away from here." To me, her story rang familiar. She continued, "He told me he didn't care if I was broke, I'd better get away from that motel before he put the cuffs on me. I didn't want to go to jail. I had not got in no trouble in New York, and I sure didn't want to go to jail in Connecticut." "Nobody knows me here, and you got to have friends when you get in trouble with the police. I was scared when he told me about putting the cuffs on me, so I ran from that place," she said. She walked back to New London. She was so tired, all she could do was think about finding a place to rest. It had taken her a long time to walk across the bridge, and the only place she knew to rest was the train station. She went to the station, found an empty bench, and tried to get some sleep. "I couldn't get comfortable in the station, but I did doze off a couple of times."

The lady stayed overnight at my house, and the next morning after breakfast, I took her to the train station. I bought her a ticket back to New York, and gave her money to get back to her apartment.

Maybe I should have dropped it then and there, but because of her disheartening statements about Groton in particular, and Connecticut in general, I felt I had to follow up, even though I knew there was little more that could be done for her. Over the years we had worked hard to try to keep such things from occurring. I decided to pursue the issue. I called the New York employment agency that morning and spoke with the manager I asked him if he knew the lady. "Yes, I sent her out of town to a good job. And I even bought the train ticket for her," he responded. "Oh my God," was his reaction when I told him what had happened. "I sent her there because they had asked for someone. I feel terrible about this. But maybe I can make it up to her somehow," he said. "You know I would never send anyone off on an imaginary trip. They had called me from that motel, and in trying to make sure the girl went there, I spent money to be absolutely sure. She said that was a good chance for her to get away from New York." He thanked me for our help in the situation.

From the beginning of the episode, I was told the motel owners were not like that. I was told they were in favor of and believed in equal opportunity. They said something had gone haywire at the motel while they were away. I had never met the owners, so I couldn't say what I believed their views were.

The white female who called the police came to my house a couple of days after the incident. I don't know to this day whether she had been pressured by her employers to make the effort, but she came to try to explain her side of the incident. I needed some answers for my personal satisfaction. In trying to impress me, and show me that no discrimination was involved or intended, she brought along a black man who also worked at the motel. I guess the black man's presence was supposed to take the edge off the discrimination charge. I was not impressed at all and, thinking the way I do, it probably would have been better if all whites had come.

The black man tried to explain what had happened at the motel that afternoon. That was strange because he was not at work that day. I could not see the relevancy in giving him the opportunity of telling me anything about an event that he had not witnessed. I strongly hinted that I resented him being in my presence as a front. I wanted the lady who had been involved in the situation to tell me what had transpired. In that way I could make my own determination. The incident had been serious, and soon they came to realize how serious.

I told the woman, "You laughed when the policeman was giving the lady hell. You thought it was a big joke. But she didn't see anything funny about it at all." The woman said it wasn't she who was laughing. "It was some of the others," she said. "And besides that, I am not prejudiced I want you to know. I've known this man for a long time. And he can tell you I don't have a prejudiced bone in my body."

I knew the lady was responding to my attitude, and she was disturbed by it. But I had had heard enough to draw conclusions. "Don't worry," I told her, "The girl is back in New York. Unless I see the need to bring her back here, she will stay in New York." I

thought it necessary to tell her, "You didn't have the decency, or the courtesy, to even give the lady cab fare to get out of Groton." She responded with, "I'm not authorized to give the motel's money to anyone. I didn't know anything about a New York agency until yesterday. And that girl's going to be taken care of. We are sending her some money for all the aggravation she suffered. Now does that look like we're prejudiced?" The black worker received some money from the motel. The money probably looked good to her because she had nothing. The incident however still took a toll on her.

I wondered for a long time, what would have happened if the black woman had been a local resident. What I concluded was that it would have been interesting. Though the incident was newsworthy, it was given little publicity. I had to choose between losing an attorney and publicizing all the facts, as I knew them. Our attorney was a friend of the motel owners, and he assured me the owners were not unfriendly to our cause. But I knew whatever the owners felt about our cause for equal rights, they were still responsible for the on-the-job conduct of their employees. We made a mistake by not publicizing the entire episode. And I take the blame for that. We released a little news story. The only thing I could do, in light of my decision not to follow up, was to refer the case to the Commission on Civil Rights. I knew when I filed with them it was the end of the motel case since the commission had enough on its hands processing complaints from Connecticut residents.

Even if they processed the lady's complaint and we won, it would not have made her leave New York. I felt we had an excellent case, but the problem of distance was against us. After filing with the commission, I tried to convince Faulk to go with me to New York. He said he had something else to do that Saturday, so I drove down alone. I had attempted to contact the lady by telephone, but to no avail. I was hoping she had not given up her apartment when she left for the motel job. As strange as it was for her in New London and Groton, it was as strange for me in New York. The address she had given me was on the East Side. I had been in New York just shortly before the incident, but had not been on that side of town for years. It had changed tremendously over the years, and the change was for the worse.

I had an eerie feeling as I drove into her neighborhood. The landlord was extremely evasive. He did not tell me the lady had given up the apartment and, yet, he did not say that she still lived there. We talked through the door that was only open about two inches. I was a stranger to him and I tried to convince him that I was a friend. He knew the lady, but he said, "in the city one couldn't be too careful." I realized I wasn't going to be allowed inside, but I couldn't return home without knowing how the lady was doing. I sat in my car a long time trying to figure out what I was going to do. Finally I decided I needed help and drove to one of the police precinct stations to see if there was anything that they could do.

When I entered the station door, I was not sure I was in the right place. The first thing that greeted me was a bottle of whiskey. The bottle was turned up to the desk officer's head. The room reeked with the odor of alcohol. Maybe it was not all that bad, but seeing the officer with the bottle caused it to seem that way. I went to the desk and spoke and the officer acknowledged my presence. His face was reddened and he looked as if he should have been off duty. The officer was nice enough and he listened while I explained my problem. I told him about the landlord and said that the only thing I wanted

to know was whether the lady still lived at the apartment. He called to another officer sitting nearby and explained it to him. "Why don't you run around there with him. You can probably get the landlord to understand that this is an emergency," he said. I thanked the deskman for being so kind, and walked to my car.

I waited for the officer to turn his car around, and followed him back to the building. We went up the stairs and the officer rang the bell. The landlord told the officer that the lady still lived there, but she wasn't home. The officer told the landlord the same thing I had previously, but he added, "Why don't you let him come in and wait for her? We know all about him and you can trust him," he said, and the landlord let me enter. "Can't trust too many people these days," the landlord stated as he walked to the dining room, "not even the police." We sat in the dining room and talked. The landlord's wife was there and she knew the lady's story better than I. It would appear she had talked at length with the tenant. It was funny when she wondered out loud why her husband wouldn't let me in the first time. He told her a person should be warned when they're going to have company. I could understand his feelings and told him I agreed with him.

I waited a long time, but the young lady finally came home. She was surprised and happy to see me. She again made it clear that she wanted no more to do with Connecticut. She said that she would never go to Connecticut again. I knew it was a vain attempt, but I tried to explain to her that her case was an isolated case and she should not feel that way. I came out on the losing end because none of the three believed me. The young woman said that the motel had sent money to compensate her. She failed to specify the amount, but I knew it wasn't enough to kill the pain of her ordeal. I hoped it would have at least soothed her, even if it were only momentarily. With the knowledge that she was fine, I wished her good luck and left New York City thinking it was a shame what had happened to her. I was determined to try to see that it would not happen again and worn out as I was from our other activities, it was going to be a challenge.

### **George Wallace Rally**

Challenges came fast and furious for the NAACP as large urban rebellions and riots hit U.S. cities from 1965 to 1967. The call for black power by Stokely Carmichael, Willie Ricks, and members of the Black Panther Party shocked and frightened black middle class leaders and whites. With promises for change slow and unfilled, black power advocates acquired a stronger presence. White racists, such as ex-Alabama Governor George Wallace, capitalized on the rebellions and calls for black power by stressing law and order and white supremacy. Some black and white leaders stressed that black power was reverse racism. They also stressed their disapproval of the NAACP and SCLC.

When Wallace decided to run for the presidency in 1968, I saw a notice of a Wallace for president rally in *The Day*. The organizers scheduled the event in a room in one of the buildings at Ocean Beach Park. It was advertised as an organizing affair and it struck my fancy. I wanted to attend the meeting to see if any racial issues would be discussed. Even though I was interested, I did not want to go alone and I would not have gone alone. I tried to interest some of my board members, but no one seemed interested in attending.

As the night of the event approached, it looked hopeless and I had almost put the thought of attending out of my mind when another thought came to mind. If the rally

were newsworthy, I figured reporters would cover it. I called Mal Morse of the *Norwich Bulletin* and asked if he was going. He said because it was the initial meeting he felt there would not be too much news and he decided not to go. Mal asked me if I was interested in going. I told him I would have liked to go just out of curiosity. I said there probably would not be any more blacks going, but if I knew of a friend going, I would tag along. Mal changed his mind and said I could go with him.

Once in the room at Ocean Beach, I looked around to see if there were any people I recognized. The only person I saw was a bald-headed man who looked familiar. Morse told me it wasn't who I thought it was. As I expected, there were no blacks at the meeting. I began to look for some literature. The only things I saw were some bronze medallions. They were on a table that was sitting on the platform. I got up nerve enough to go to the platform and purchase one. The medallion was as large as a silver dollar. In addition to Wallace's head on the front side, there were these words, "Stand Up for Alabama" and "Inauguration January 4, 1963, George C. Wallace, 50th Governor." On the rear side was a coat of arms with the words, "The Arms of Alabama." It was a five-dollar keepsake that I still have.

Eventually I became comfortable. I thought I would have been the object of stares, but to my surprise, I was not. Morse had a folded sheet of paper in front of him. We were sitting at a table and when the moderator began speaking, Morse began writing. The moderator told the gathering he hoped Wallace would come to New London, but said he might not have the opportunity. They needed a committee to extend an invitation to Wallace so that even if he couldn't come he would know he had a group of backers in New London. They also needed committees for other things, the man said. The man talked on and on and it was really a dry meeting, boring as it could be. I reached the point at which I wished I hadn't gone. Morse didn't say anything to me about the meeting so I had no idea how he felt. He kept on writing. I wondered how he could make a story out of what the moderator was saying. A *Day* reporter came in and sat at end of the table. He reached into the inside pocket of his coat and removed a single sheet of paper. About ten minutes passed as the moderator continued to talk. In my opinion, he still had not said anything newsworthy, but what did I know about reporting? I assumed that professional reporters would know how to make a story out of it. Morse and the *Day's* reporter were busy writing, so something had to be there.

Suddenly, the moderator noticed the *Day* reporter taking notes, although he missed Morse sitting directly in front of him. He became irate. "Are you a reporter?" the moderator asked. "Yes I am," the reporter said. "Are you taking notes on this meeting?" the moderator asked. The *Day's* reporter said he was. "We don't want any publicity on this meeting," the moderator said. I could sense a change in the moderator's voice. The reporter told him the meeting was advertised in the newspapers and, therefore, should be open to the public. The moderator did not back down. With the reporter still protesting, the moderator walked down from the stage. He snatched the reporter's notes from the table and ripped them to shreds. As the moderator was ripping the reporter's notes, I saw Mal Morse slowly fold his notes and slip them inside his coat pocket. The reporter, flushed with anger, and obviously embarrassed, stood and prepared to leave.

Mal Morse stood and told the moderator the meeting was advertised for the public and, therefore, it was in the public interest to cover it. The moderator was very angry. He

told Morse the same thing he had told the *Day's* reporter. The meeting was not for newspaper coverage and he would rather the reporters left the meeting. Morse asked the moderator if there was something to hide. I don't believe the moderator had a chance to answer him. Morse's anger overcame him. He said to the moderator, "Why don't you crawl back under the rock that you just crawled from under?"

To me, those were fighting words. I don't know what to think. Morse had put on his coat and was walking out with the other reporter. I was sitting there watching how others were reacting. Suddenly, I realized I had come to the meeting with Morse. Anyway, there was no way I could have remained. I bounced to my feet, coat on my arm, and hurriedly followed the two reporters out of the building. We all went to the Crocker House restaurant where Morse gave the *Day's* reporter his notes. The *Norwich Bulletin* carried the story the following morning. The New London paper carried it that evening. Both articles told of the reporter's notes being destroyed. But there was much more to that evening of which I was unaware. One newspaper mentioned Jane Torrey and other white NAACP members being in attendance. "They indicated they had come out of curiosity," the *Day* reporter wrote. I read the *Norwich Bulletin's* report years later and was flabbergasted to see that the reporter also quoted me as being there out of curiosity.

George Wallace never made it to our area as his supporters had wished. In September 1968, the NAACP began an anti-Wallace voter drive. Later, an incident occurred, which was happening all too often during that era. That was an attempt to assassinate Wallace, which resulted in his being permanently paralyzed.

## Years of Violence

Long before I became involved in the NAACP, I paid attention to Southern violence against black people. The lynchings, bombings, and assassinations were a part of the American culture. Blacks were disposed of in all sorts of ways. I remember watching a documentary on Mississippi. Authorities were dragging a river to see if they could locate a body. They eventually found the body they were looking for, but not before they had dredged up nine other bodies. All had been killed by one means or another and all of them were black. Whites committed wholesale murder on blacks. It appeared to me to be the South's order of the day.

Constantly hearing of people being murdered because of their race or civil rights activities made me weary. I had heard about lynching at an early age although the lynching of black citizens in earlier years did not garner widespread notice in white newspapers. Black papers such as *Chicago Defender*, *Amsterdam News*, *Norfolk-Journal and Guide*, *Pittsburgh Courier*, and *Baltimore Afro-American* all carried news about racial lynchings. Some of those papers carried a yearly count of lynchings. One lynching came after Reverend George W. Lee, a minister and NAACP leader, conducted a voter registration drive in Beizoni, Mississippi, in 1955. For his efforts, Reverend Lee was murdered. Lamar Smith was another Mississippi lynch victim. The murder remembered by most was that of Emmett Till.

Authorities in Mississippi found the body of the fourteen-year-old Till, a northerner from Chicago, shot, mutilated, and castrated in the Tallahatchie River. Black newspapers and *Jet* magazine called for action. The court tried J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant, two

white Mississippians for the murder; however, an all white jury acquitted them in one hour. Later, they confessed to reporter William Bradford Huie that they murdered Till. The 1950s brought about a change in white newspaper reporting on lynching. The Lee, Smith, and Till murders received wide publicity in the white as well as the black news media. After that came the huge headlines on Mack Charles Parker. Parker was jailed for a falsely reported rape in 1959. He was set-up, let out of jail, and lynched soon thereafter.

After that came a rash of deaths from assassinations or bombings. The bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church took the lives of four young black women. The death of President John Kennedy was preceded by the death of our own Medgar Evers in June 1963. I think Evers' death was the beginning of the deaths that began sapping my strength. William L. Moore, a white Baltimore postman and civil rights protester, had met his death in April, two months before Evers did in 1963.

Killings of civil rights workers continued. In 1964, Neshoba County Klansmen from Mississippi murdered James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner. Klansmen dumped the bodies into a Mississippi cofferdam. In 1965, Viola Liuzzo became a victim of Ku Klux Klan violence. The Detroit housewife met her death by shotgun blast on an Alabama highway. Ironically, an FBI informant was in the car with the murderer.

The list continued with others. During the Selma campaign of 1965, Alabama racists beat Rev. James Reeb to death with clubs. Malcolm X was assassinated in New York's Audubon Ballroom. In 1966, Sammy Younge, Jr., a black college student, was slain for attempting to use a restroom at a Texaco Station in Tuskegee, Alabama. Seven days later, nightriders firebombed the home of black civil rights leader Vernon Dahmer in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

I struggled through 1967 into 1968. I was now serving another year of what was supposed to be a one-year term. Those years, as far as I'm concerned, were horror episodes. I don't know if my associates were aware of it, but I was just going through the motions. I tried my best to portray the face of a man free from fatigue and mental distress. That was especially true in 1967. The cities of Buffalo, Cleveland, Atlanta, Newark, Hartford, and others were being ravaged by riots. With that occurring, I could see a reversal of the movement as I had known it. The face of America was rapidly changing and with that rapid change, I felt as if I were being ground into the dust. I was totally unprepared for what was happening. We had worked so hard to change the country's policies without violence. But here it was upon us. It was confusing. Answers eluded me. I remember someone telling me that Councilor Tom Griffin said it was I who had prevented riots from occurring in New London. I have never been able to figure that one out. Curiously, *A Diverse People, Connecticut, 1914, To The Present*, by Herbert F. Janick, Jr., copyrighted in 1975, states that riots occurred in New London in the summer of 1967. That assertion is totally false.

By the end of 1967, I was mentally and physically worn out. No one knew how much I wanted to throw in the towel. I had a good excuse to do so. I had been reelected for just one year and not two. I really wanted 1967 to end so I could get out of office, but, for some reason, I decided to stay when the membership remained silent on the matter. I felt that as long as there were no criticisms from within, I would hang on until the end.

I didn't go around asking people if they wanted me to stay. And no one told me they wanted me to leave. One reason for hanging on was that President Lyndon Johnson had asked Congress to address the housing issue. I had seen legislation passed on employment, public accommodations, and voting rights, so why not stay in office to see a housing act passed. It was the last of the four large pieces of legislation that we had fought for over the years. That's the excuse I used for staying at the time, but I honestly don't know what the true reason was. We still had things going on at the local level that were important to me, so it might have been a combination of reasons including some selfishness on my part. I didn't want to leave until most of those issues we had raised were settled. Indications were that housing legislation would pass, and I guess a little part of me wanted to be in office to celebrate this. On April 10, 1968, six days after Martin Luther King, Jr., had been assassinated, Congress finally enacted the "all important" housing legislation. I remember wishing he were alive to celebrate it and to join the black leaders who traveled to Washington to watch President Johnson sign the legislation. Dr. King's efforts resulted in those huge national legal changes. And therein lies at least one more story.

In 1968, Robert F. Kennedy met the same fate as JFK, Martin King, and all the rest of my heroes. And even though all were heroes to me, King was the one who stood tallest in my mind. I was busy on April 4, 1968, making out the agenda for our board meeting and I hadn't turned on either the television or the radio. When I had finished the agenda, I stuck it in my briefcase and walked out into the darkness. That evening I almost drove although the meeting was at Shiloh Baptist only a block away. I remember sitting in my automobile ready to make the short drive, but then I found myself locking the door and walking. I had thought, while making out the agenda, that I would be doing this for only a few more months. I never suspected that something that would greatly affect our movement was occurring in those hours.

I was crossing High Street, when Attorney Matt Shafner, drove down Franklin Street onto High Street and parked. I stopped and waited for him to get out of his Volkswagen. That evening was dark so I couldn't see his face well. He asked me if I had heard any news. I told him that I had been busy making out the agenda for the meeting. Shafner, with his voice breaking, then relayed the devastating news, "Martin Luther King's been shot, and it looks pretty bad. It doesn't appear he can survive." I was stunned. He continued, "They don't know who shot him, but it is all over the radio, on all of the stations." We sat in his car and listened to the radio, both dazed. Shafner had first heard the news on his car radio while driving to the meeting. Tears welled in my eyes. I found myself hating Matthew Shafner. I cannot remember if I had hatred for every white person at that time or not. It could have been because it was he who had broken the news to me. If a black person had told me, I probably would have felt otherwise.

I looked at Matt and saw his lips moving. He was still talking, but I didn't hear what he was saying. When he first told me, I had hoped he was lying, but I knew he was telling me the truth. I did not know who had shot King, but my instincts told me it was a white person. I guess if Shafner had seen my face, or could have read my mind at that time, he would have pushed me out of his automobile. The animosity caused by injustice in the country spilled over into anger against Shafner.

He and I walked to the church and put up a note canceling the meeting. We then returned to his car to listen to more radio coverage. The news was repetitious. Medgar



Evers crossed my mind as Shafner drove around the block to my house. Once home, I immediately turned on the radio. April 4, 1968, added to my burden and I found myself wondering again why I had chosen to serve another year. I believe someone from a newspaper called me to get a comment.

It was silent at work the following morning. I heard none of the usual comments from co-workers disparaging civil rights. A detective's visit probably caused the silence. That morning, April 5, 1968, Detective Raymond W. Griswold, of the New London Police Department, visited Sullivan Motors. As he entered the service door, he glanced at me. I spoke to him, but he did not reply. I thought that was odd for him because it was out of character for him. We had always spoken in the past. It didn't take long for me to find out the reason for this behavior. The service manager informed me that I was wanted in Joe Sullivan's office. There I learned that someone had called the police station and threatened me. Detective Griswold had told Sullivan about the threat and Sullivan was visibly shaken by this news. Griswold told me the only thing they knew for certain was that "the caller was a white male." At the time what Griswold was saying to me had no effect at all. He went on to say that he didn't think that the boss should send me on the road. "You never know whether it's a crank or not."

"I wouldn't send him on the road under any circumstances," Sullivan stated. Maybe I was taking the phone threat too lightly, but I told them, "I hardly believe that anyone wanting to shoot me would advertise it. Especially to the police."

Sullivan warned me not to take the situation too lightly. "You never know what that crackpot has in his mind," he said. He then suggested that the police provide me with some sort of protection. At that I really had a real good laugh. I guess they thought I was out of my mind. But I saw no danger at all, especially if the person had broadcast the fact before hand. Before Griswold left, he turned to me and said, "You all be careful won't you." I told him I would keep an eye out for anything that might look suspicious. Sullivan asked me to stay in the office while he went to have Service Manager Lennon paged. When the service manager arrived, Sullivan told him not to let me go on the road at all that day.

I returned to the job and completed what I had been working on. Even though I had no fear of the caller, I had to think about him. I wondered where he had called from. I also wondered whether he was young or old, or whether he just called the police for publicity purposes. I knew if he wanted publicity, he wasn't going to get any from me. The only way he would have done that was if he knew the police would tell the newspapers. There had been plenty of threatening calls and letters during my time in office and I had always ignored them. I sure didn't want anything to happen to me, but I just couldn't believe anyone would tell the police what they were going to do, and be serious about it. I was to become somewhat less brave, after I took an automobile outside.

After I parked it, instead of getting out, I sat there and looked around. I was almost of a mind to drive the car back inside after I viewed the situation. It was then that I realized that I was a sitting duck in the parking lot, if there was such a thing as a sniper around. Joe Sullivan's parking lot was wide open. If someone was in a building on Cottage, Huntington, Broad, or Jay Streets, they could easily pick me off. It was an uneasy feeling that I don't care to have again. In all my years, that was the only time I felt

really on edge and, for that matter, really threatened. As I sat there, I thought about our activities over the past years. I tried to think about the pleasant things, but it did little good. I realized we had made some people angry, and that was what I had intended. But I hadn't intended to make them so angry that someone would want to take my life. I must have sat in that car for a good half-hour. Then I took another look around, took a deep breath, and walked away from the automobile to the shop.

I told myself that if I could walk across the lot, which was close to one hundred feet, and nothing happened then, nothing would happen at all. When I finally reached the door of the building, I took one long last look around and saw nothing that was an obvious danger to me. I opened the door and entered the building.

I was given another job order for an automobile sitting in the parking lot. I took the job order and walked to the door. I hesitated, looking through the small windows outdoors. I don't remember what I was thinking, but all of a sudden, the feeling of apprehension was no more. Whoever it was who had called the police station at 8:27 the morning of April 5, 1968, probably didn't have anything better to do. His call really only served to intimidate those not involved in the civil rights struggle. True, I was concerned for about forty-five minutes earlier that morning, but when the trauma ended, it was never to return. I felt such little danger as a result of the call that I didn't even mention it to family members until after I had been out of office for a long time. I felt I had to confide in someone, however, so I told those members of our executive board with whom I was closely aligned. One of those I told became upset because I had shunned police protection. "I certainly think you ought to reconsider their offer, even if the bodyguard is only until after Dr King's funeral," she said.

On the day of Reverend King's funeral, Joe Sullivan closed his doors out of respect for the man. I sat at home thinking about Dr. King, and what he had meant to the nation. I was waiting for the television to show the proceedings when the telephone rang. Unhesitatingly, I answered it. I believe it was the same man who had called the police station at 8:27 a.m. on Friday April 5, because his voice was clear and he was unmistakably white. The man wanted to know if he had reached the NAACP office. I told him he had.

He responded with an awful message, "We're all glad that Dr. King is dead," he said. I wanted to say something that shouldn't be put in print, but I thought better of it. Something told me to be nice and he'd go away. Apparently it worked. "Thank you," I said. Without uttering another word, the caller hung up. I wondered if I had said the right thing. The deluge of crude behavior did not end that day. I was hit with it again when I returned to work the following day. A fellow employee remarked, "Where can we find someone else for that fellow to kill, so we can have another day off?" I didn't answer the crude remark. I remembered that Dr. King preached non-violence, so I just stared at my co-worker until he went back to his work area. A few days later, I received a letter postmarked Tampa, Florida. The sender wrote, "The Coon is dead. Long live Martin Luther Coon."

Amidst all this, I reacted as little as possible. I only took care of the activities I deemed essential. I knew Clarence Faulk wanted the presidency and if the branch wanted him, it would be easy for him to be elected. I felt he was the most likely one to succeed

me. Whether it was Faulk or someone else, a drastic change would have to take place. Many important historic events had occurred while I had been in office and the times were different now. We had picketed, nagged, cajoled, agitated, angered, and sometimes demanded things to destroy barriers. There were letter writing campaigns to senators, representatives, governors, and presidents. Our activities helped people get jobs, homes, and even a coffee. Though the struggle continued, we did have newly passed legislation dealing with employment, public accommodations, voting rights, and housing. These legislative initiatives took some of the fearful uncertainty out of what we had been trying to accomplish. Now federal civil rights laws were on the books.

I never entered NAACP activities looking for anything tangible for myself. The only thing I wanted was personal satisfaction. No matter what the temptation, I wanted nothing short of it. On several occasions, I had the opportunity to compromise that goal. On each such occasions, I had to make it clear that I was not for sale. I worked hard for the NAACP during my six years as president. In most cases, I gave my best effort.

### **High School Walkout**

I felt that I let people down during the New London High School walkout. The episode caused me a lot of concern because of my business and social relationship with one of the participants. I considered the Ecclestons, L. Reginald, Jr., and his wife, Arena, two of my true friends. When I initially began to write about this episode, I felt that I had to cover up a certain part. I wrote and rewrote it because it seemed that my friendship was too strong to permit me to use Mrs. Eccleston's name. But each time I wrote about the incident and Mrs. Eccleston's name was not included, the account just didn't seem right.

Then one day, having been tormented by the fact that I would be doing a disservice to history, I included Mrs. Eccleston's name. Her husband and I were going on a short trip and I insisted that we take my automobile. I had made a copy of the part in which his wife was involved. Out of respect for our friendship, I wanted him to see what I was going to make a permanent part of history if it was ever published in book form. Buddy Eccleston, as he was commonly known, only got to his wife's name. When he saw it, he stopped reading. Then he turned to me and said, "Make sure you get it right now." I said to him, "Oh, it's going to be." From the day of that revelation, we continued to travel together and I have no idea whether he ever told his wife.

On April 5, 1968, sixty-one black high school students walked out of the school. It couldn't have happened at a more inopportune time for me personally. As far as I could determine, the students, or at least some of them, left the school to avoid trouble. Others apparently walked out because of disrespect shown by some of the white students, who made uncomplimentary remarks concerning Dr. King and his death. Word of the disparaging remarks spread like wildfire among blacks and the atmosphere was extremely hostile. Jeering interrupted classes. In the tradition of civil rights activists, the students staged a walkout. This protest served notice that black students would not accept unjust treatment at this critical moment in their lives. They avoided a potential racial clash by exiting from a hostile situation.

After school hours, officials notified the parents of the sixty-one black students about their behavior and told them their sons and daughters would be disciplined for

participating in the walkout. As I have indicated, personally it couldn't have happened at a worse time. I was trying to complete my term, and, also, Dr. King's death had completely drained me. I did not need any additional distractions, because I was still in shock from the night before.

When I heard what the students had done and the actions contemplated by school officials, I became angry. Very angry! But I don't know which angered me the most, the students, or the school officials. I wondered what they were trying to do to me. It seemed as if they were plotting their every move with me in mind. I felt persecuted. There were a lot of emotions involved in that school crisis. The radio and newspapers kept people aware of the events. Debates raged in neighborhoods and on street corners. What would happen next?

I knew a lot of questions were being asked of me over the issue. But I just couldn't bring myself to gear up for the battle. There had been a time when I would have fought the school officials single-handedly, but my will to fight had disappeared. I had no choice except to let someone else do it. I never liked leaving a job for others to do, but I could muster neither the energy nor the desire. I really felt sorry for myself, but cared for little else. Thinking back over the years with a foggy memory, I cannot even remember the NACCP getting involved in the matter. I received a tremendous amount of information. The controversy lasted well over a month. It culminated in an overflow meeting at the board of education.

Most of the controversy centered on Principal William L. Foye. Black parents accused him of knowingly discriminating against their children. Foye wrote each parent a letter concerning the walkout. In the letter, Foye stated that the student's attendance records "would show the classes skipped," and that each of the students failed to follow "proper procedure for dismissal." Foye's letter contained another matter of importance. It said the students participated in an "unauthorized demonstration." To me, he was trampling on free speech and expression. The students' activity seemed spontaneous to me. When they walked out of their classrooms, they gathered on the lawn outside of the school. Some students went to their homes, but others banded together and marched from the school to the Bank Street Teen Center.

Not knowing anywhere else to turn, the parents retained the services of Attorney John J. Donahue of the Legal Services Agency (LEGACY). Donahue's first step was to request a meeting between parents and board of education officials. Attorney Donahue responded to the school officials in a letter on April 26, 1968, stating that the disciplinary action against the students was "far too drastic in view of certain extenuating circumstances." Students told their parents some of the extenuating circumstances involved. Not only had Dr. King been murdered, they said, some of the white students had been openly gleeful about the heinous crime.

Black parents and students and their attorney met with the school board on May 15 to settle the issue. I managed to drag myself to that meeting. I did not anticipate the drama that would unfold at the meeting as a result of support for Foye from a black faculty member, Arena P. Eccleston. When black support was expressed for Foye's actions, it probably was sweet music to school officials and supporters. But words cannot describe the reaction from the black community that followed.

To put Mrs. Eccleston's view in its proper perspective, one must know what precipitated it. School board president Mary McTigue read the board's statement affirming its support for the actions taken by Principal Foye.

*The Board of Education and the superintendent of schools, in accord with policy and standard administrative regulations, support Mr. Foye's disciplinary actions. They are informed of the events that took place and of the general emotional climate prevailing. With Mr. Foye, they sympathize with and share in the feelings of the pupils over the assassination of the Reverend Martin Luther King. With Mr. Foye, they feel that the actions taken are not punitive or discriminatory, but are necessary to the maintenance of discipline involving not just 61 but more than 1,400 boys and girls.*

Mrs. Eccleston, reacting to black parents' criticisms, and defending the board's decision, said, "They walked out with the knowledge that something would be done. They broke a rule. They understood that some punishment would be meted out." She ended the remarks by saying, "They got off pretty easily."

From what I could determine, many blacks said her opening remarks would have been sufficient. And although they said they didn't like them, most said they understood. Her final words drew caustic remarks from students and parents. Roy Sebastian, a black parent, spoke on the subject. He had three daughters attending New London High School. All three walked out. Sebastian said he was proud of them for doing so. He then spoke directly to the heart of the issue. "Where is the understanding, and the brotherhood that we all talk about? I'm seeking to find out something for myself. What is wrong here?"

Sebastian argued that the board lacked the "necessary compassion" to deal with the issue with an open mind. He spoke of no understanding between board members and mentioned their lack of communication with the (black) community. He accused the officials of acting in haste, only because the students were black. Some months earlier, Sebastian attempted unsuccessfully to become New London's first black elected school board member.

The audience heard that the day after the assassination students were requested to stand for a moment of respect to Martin Luther King's memory. Theodore Frazier, another black parent, expressed his agitation over white students being rudely critical of Dr. King. Some refused to stand for the moment of silence. "Why haven't you told what you are doing about white students who didn't show respect for Dr. King?" he asked. Frazier was given a standing ovation. In defense of his clients, Attorney Donahue argued that the sanctions meted out by Foye were unfair and that the school board minimized a critical issue while ramming their decision down throats of the black parents. School officials seemed to have forgotten Birmingham students, Greensboro students, Northern Student Movement, and other students who had taken stands for freedom, justice, and dignity.

The New London High School incident never reached the courts; however, on the national level, similar students' activities were litigated. In those cases the courts often ruled in the students' favor. And I feel the local incident, as well as similar statewide student activism, was justified. Although courts never overturned the New London school

board's decision, the students won the war in principle. They played an important part in establishing the importance of Dr. King. Connecticut was one of the first states to make Martin Luther King's birthday a state holiday. Dr. King's birthday would eventually become a national day of commemoration. New London High School's black students showed their mettle on April 5, 1968. They were a symbol of the principles taught by Dr. King, NAACP, and other nonviolent activists.

After the death of Martin Luther King, Jr., streets, parks, schools, and other sites were dedicated in Dr. King's name all across the nation. In New London in 1968, Clarence Faulk and others created the "Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Memorial Scholarship Trust Fund." This annual endowment fund drive raises funds for scholarships for outstanding high school seniors to "help provide a college education for students who wish to carry out the dreams and goals of Dr. Martin Luther King." To qualify for this scholarship, a senior must be an African American in a New London County high school or a New London County state technical school who exemplifies "Dr. King's spirit by living their lives in the pursuit of Dr. King's goals." The recipient must show achievement in the community, in academics, and citizenship, as well as financial need.

### OIC Begins

I was out of office, trying to wind down from NAACP activities when the New London County Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC) began in 1970. As with any other business, OIC has experienced the peaks and valleys of providing services to communities. The organization, which is funded and also receives private donations, at times did not have the money to do everything that had been planned. But the organization's leaders kept it on the path for which it was intended.

It hired as its director, Bennie A. Jennings. Mr. Jennings was a ten-year New London resident and was aware of and understood many of the problems of the area. But unlike in his native Mississippi, where he knew where he stood, he was to learn a lot more of the subtleties of northern society. Beginning with a budget of \$15,000, the OIC budget had risen to over a half-million dollars at the time of Mr. Jennings' retirement in 1996. In the year 2000, OIC celebrated its 30th anniversary. The organization now provides adult education, high school diploma preparation, job skills, and prevocational training. There are computer courses and a certified nurse's aide program. Besides those services, there is also a housing rehabilitation program, a food bank, and energy assistance and weatherization program.

Although there were other major contributors to the OIC program, I remember Paul Smalley being in on the ground floor. Smalley's was the first name I recognized. But in my recuperation from my 1960s adventures, I wasn't really into any new programs. I believe Mr. Smalley, along with Bennie Jennings and OIC's director of training and education, Cathy Hampton, were the workers who made OIC's program as successful as it was.

According to *The Day*, August 29, 1994, Mrs. Hampton and her associates donated their services to OIC and collected "unemployment benefits while continuing to work at the center so that classes could continue." This action was necessary because OIC's funding had been cut.

Mr. Jennings was always trying to improve on an already successful program. In the November 2, 1996, issue of *The Day*, an article stated, "Under Jennings' leadership, the local OIC chapter has trained and found jobs for more than 3,000 people, many of them under-educated and under-trained." What more needs to be said.

In 1972, seven years after the NAACP initiated talks of adding blacks to a union membership, Clarence Faulk fulfilled our principles in confrontation with the Pipefitters Union. Beginning in 1965, Faulk continued as a bloodhound, dogging union bias. His determination was to lead Willie Maultsby, Stowe Rivers, Jimmy Royal, William Smith, Angel Estrada, and Daniel Spinner into full-fledged union membership.

### **Last Official Case**

My last official case on behalf of the branch occurred in 1973, after I had relinquished my position as president. I was not chairman of any committee, and I was not even a member of the executive board. I became involved in the case by overhearing a conversation about an incident in one of our local schools. I heard that a white teacher had attacked a young black pupil. Upon investigation, I learned who the child was and when the incident occurred. I was an acquaintance of the child's parents. I called Charles Wimberly, the NAACP president to tell what I had heard and that I knew the child's parents. I told Wimberly I wanted to talk with the parents in an official capacity, but I felt I needed his permission. Without his permission, I still wanted to know more about this incident.

Mr. Wimberly gave me the go-ahead to talk with the parents and also told me I could handle the entire case if I so chose. I really only wanted to get the facts and turn them over to him, but I would go further if needed. I made an appointment with the parents, stipulating the child should be there also. I talked to the child at length. His story implied that teacher intervention had not been necessary and that the teacher struck him for "horsing" around with a friend. I wanted the names of all of the witnesses to the incident that he could remember. I wanted to get all the information that I could because if the young man was telling me the truth, this matter was serious. I visited the friend and took a statement from him. I talked to all of the witnesses I could find. Except for a few minor variations, their stories were the same. I took only two statements, then returned to the home of the alleged victim. I had the pupil describe the incident again. Being satisfied, I then took a statement from him. I discovered his father had notified the police two days earlier. For whatever reason, there had been no police investigation. I called Prosecutor Harold Dean after hearing that.

I had informed President Wimberly what was to be my strategy and he agreed to my approach. I was now playing the incident by ear. I was not sure what my next move was to be, but I was sure the teacher would get wind of the NAACP's involvement. Sure enough, the teacher called me early the following Sunday morning. He told me he wanted to talk to me about the incident. I arranged a meeting between the two of us. He was at my house less than half an hour later. Before I would let him speak in defense of himself, I told the teacher what the NAACP's position was. I told him he probably would not have struck a white child. He confirmed it. What I had just told him, he said was probably true. He said the children were boisterous and uncontrollable in the hallway that day. His position was that he didn't think that he was prejudiced "when it comes to race." But he

added, "Now the incident makes me wonder. I just blanked out when I saw them wrestling in the hall. One or both of the children could have fallen down the stairs wrestling. My intention was just to pull them apart, not hit anyone. Now I realize that I did hit someone, and I'm very sorry." I think that I could have made things very difficult for the teacher, but I decided to do it another way. I called Prosecutor Dean at home and made an appointment with him for that Monday. I told him that the teacher would accompany me. I do not know whether the teacher blanked out or not, but I do know he was sorry. The police, without explanation, held the father's complaint almost a week. Judging by their actions, or lack of action, it is doubtful an arrest would have been made.

The teacher and I kept our Monday appointment with Dean. The teacher agreed that I had been fair to him. Dean said the teacher was correct because I could have caused him (the teacher) "a lot of problems." Ten years before I would have caused the teacher a lot of problems. But at that particular time, I was just on a special assignment. I did not want to prolong the episode any longer than was necessary. When they had finished praising me, I sat as the prosecutor chastised the teacher severely. Although part of the job, it was a pitiful sight to see. His castigation was an awful thing to hear. If that episode had taken place in the early 1960s, I probably wouldn't have felt sorry for the teacher. But in 1973, and five years out of office, time seemed to have mellowed me. But I wasn't going to let anyone in that office know how I felt.

The teacher could not decide whether he had "blacked out" or if he had "blanked out." I thought, in that sense, those two words were interchangeable. But, as the prosecutor and teacher bantered words back and forth, their different meanings began to appear to be critical. Apparently they would have made a big difference in court. We would never make it that far, of course.

The publicity was kept to a minimum. In fact, when the newspapers dug into the case, it had long been over. That was the one time that I was amused because a case had not been aired in the newspapers. *The Day*, reporting the story on February 6, 1973, had no idea how heavily the NAACP had been involved. The newspaper article discussed the police reports and the reports of school officials. According to the police, their report had been forwarded to the prosecutor. The case was "a hot potato" according to the investigating detective. A school official said that he had not seen a report.

I was as close to the situation as anyone, and communicated with the teacher. Although he kept it to himself, I believe he felt the world closed in on him. Nevertheless, I think the entire episode made the teacher a better man, even though he was dragged through the mud. When we met with Prosecutor Dean that Monday afternoon, I felt responsible for the tongue-lashing he received. But when that conference ended, the teacher thanked me for being fair with him. The child's parents left it up to me to resolve the issue my way. I wondered and worried whether the resolution would be satisfactory to them. They agreed with my decision.

This caused my activist adrenaline to pump again. It was not that difficult. After all, I had rested for five years. I am not saying that I had shaken the NAACP from my system from my previous activities. The activist yearnings never left me. In fact, after a few years of dormancy, they raged at different times during the 1980s.



# Epilogue

The political and economic climate for blacks in New London changed during the years of the civil rights struggle. Beginning with the 1969 breakthrough election to the city council of Ernest Kydd, Jr., the movement brought hope for improvement in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1979, Leo Jackson became the first black person to hold the office of mayor in a New England city. Coalition building and a solid political base resulted in the Rev. Wade Hyslop's election as state representative in the 39th District. The Rev. Benjamin K. Watts pushed to develop a community center at Shiloh Baptist Church providing services, such as tutorials, cultural education, and computer training. New London, under pressure, hired its first firemen of color, and Waterford hired Oliver White its first police officer of color. In 1976 Norwich began working on an affirmative action program.

In the 1980s and '90s, however, it appeared to me that black attitudes began to reflect a selfishness I had not previously noticed. Maybe I had been too busy during the struggles of the 1960s to have paid attention to black attitudes then. Maybe the deceit and the greed and, yes, the selfishness I saw now were there in the 1960s. But whether they were or not, they became more obvious in the 1980s and 1990s.

I watched the local movement go almost full cycle. I remember how black leadership acted, sometimes out of fear, during the 1930s, '40s, and '50s. In some cases, leadership was compelled to act the parts of servants or bootlickers. Those were dangerous times as many examples can show. William Holden, an outspoken black man in the 1930s, was threatened with dismissal from his job for speaking out against injustice. Joseph Coleman, Sr., was dismissed from his job for attempting to unionize garage workers in the 1950s. In the 1980s and 1990s no one threatened the black leadership. I witnessed NAACP leadership now adopting the tactics of appeasement hoping to avert trouble. That was a mistake. I would not have attempted that.

## **Working at EB**

After many years of working for local automobile dealers, I hesitatingly applied for employment at EB. I say "hesitatingly" because the NAACP and I, beginning in the early 1960s, had been at odds with the shipyard. Those early years had not been pleasant. In subsequent years, however, as we began to resolve some of the racial issues, the unpleasantness lessened. I could have gone to work for the company during those turbulent years, but if I had, people might have thought I had sold out. Now, nine years after ending active work with the NAACP, I applied for a job at EB. I wanted to be just another applicant judged solely on my mechanical ability, which, I felt, was quite sufficient. When blacks discovered I had applied, many thought I was going there to continue the civil rights crusade. I told them I expected to be just another employee for the company, the same as they were.

I worked hard in my first month at EB. I wanted to go through my probationary period with an unblemished record and I succeeded. But I was astonished by the racial attitudes I found among white workers. Supervisors, who had been at the company for

years and who should have known better, were openly expressing racist views, which, in turn, influenced some of the white workers. The bi-racial committee, which the NAACP had worked so hard to have formed, no longer existed. In the 1960s we had worked diligently with EB officials in the Industrial Relations Department who were responsible for the elimination of unfair labor practices. Now the company had created an internal Equal Employment Opportunity Department (EEO). From my dealings with that department and talks with other black employees, I came to believe that the EEO was a shadow department with little strength.

I learned firsthand about how the internal EEO would treat a case. Over the months, I had reported a series of incidents to my general foreman and there had been no action. So I had filed a complaint against my supervisor with my union. After I filed with the union, someone suggested that I also file with EEO and I called Louis Cornelius, head of the internal EEO. He told me to write out everything that had occurred and give it to him. One evening in June 1983 I wrote out my detailed complaint. I included the names of witnesses, dates, and other material that could be readily checked. I presented the signed document to Cornelius.

In the meantime, in the First Step of the union grievance procedure, my supervisor denied he had harassed me or discriminated against me in any manner when questioned by union officers and again in a face-to-face meeting with the union steward and me. At the Second Step of the grievance procedure, a formal hearing with the Industrial Relations Department, I presented some charges, including one involving an overtime assignment. I did not address charges that would require my giving the names of witnesses. I wanted to present them at the Third Step hearing when five people from the union and five people from the company would be involved. I wanted to save my best information for then and I was being cautious because I did not want to put any of my witnesses in danger. At the Second Step hearing, my supervisor again denied all of the charges, including the one concerning overtime. This was a key issue and I knew the records would show he used a double standard in my case.

I began making daily calls to my union. I didn't call the EEO office as frequently, but I called enough to let them know that I was still around. They told me nothing and at the end of six months none of my witnesses had even been questioned. After six months there had been just one inconclusive hearing and one bit of unofficial information given to me, which was that I was right about the overtime issue. Because of major surgery in 1984, I was out for eight months. When I returned to work in September 1984 my concern was for my health. I did not make any calls concerning my case. I returned to the same supervisor that I had the complaint against.

The first official word concerning my complaint to EEO came in a letter dated December 27, 1984, a year and a half after I had filed my charges. After receiving the letter, I tried to type a reply three or four times. I made a lot of errors because I was so angry. Finally, mistakes or no mistakes, I decided to send what I had written. In my letter, dated January 11, 1985, I questioned whether the complaint had been processed at all. I wrote, "I received your letter dated December 27, 1984. Your records are very correct. I did file a complaint with your office a year and a half ago. It's obvious the complaint has come to naught." I continued, "It appears that you have been unable or unwilling to pursue it, as evidenced by your letter ... Since other events have occurred since I initially

filed, your letter gives credence to my last statement. I cannot honestly understand how you can further process my complaint, due to the fact it has laid dormant in your office since mid-1983." After the EEO officials received my reply, they sent me a certified letter stating that as a result of my January 11 letter the charges of discrimination were closed. This letter, like the first one, angered me greatly.

### **The Martin Luther King Holiday**

Milton Cook, Jr., eleventh president of the New London NAACP (1980 through 1986), tackled the New London Board of Education in 1983. Cook's method of operation was a masterpiece, I thought. The issue was the closing of the New London public schools in celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday. In 1983, Dr. King's birthday, January 15, fell on a Saturday. That triggered a series of events beginning with Sondra Liburd-Jordan's article in *The Day*. Ms. Liburd-Jordan, a staff reporter, wrote, "In southeastern Connecticut, the majority of public schools would remain open and not celebrate the holiday on Friday, January 14." All of the private schools would remain open also.

School officials were taking advantage of a state statute that permitted public schools to remain open when a holiday falls on a Saturday. But the position of the New London School Board incensed many black New Londoners. President Cook attended the school board meeting Thursday evening, January 13, to confirm a statement he had made earlier in the day asking parents not to send their children to school if New London did not observe the holiday that Friday. He brought with him Vernice Cook, a retired New London schoolteacher, Rev. L. David Cornish, a New London minister, and Bennie Jennings, director of OIC of New London County. According to *The Day*, between eighty and one hundred interested black spectators attended that meeting at the New London Junior High School. After hearing the speakers and deliberating for a short period of time, the board reversed its position.

The media was notified of the closings immediately. According to the newspaper, the board's decision went out over the air at 9:30 that night. Many heard the announcement and acted accordingly, but many others were unaware of it and sent their children to school that Friday, which was a very, very cold day; sixteen degrees, according to the news article. The closing of the New London schools caused the parochial schools, which depended on public school buses for transportation, to close. According to the newspaper, of the 169 school districts in Connecticut, 132 did not close that Friday. In southeastern Connecticut, those not closing were in East Lyme, Ledyard, Stonington, North Stonington, Waterford, Montville, Salem, and private schools in Norwich. Schools closed in Old Saybrook, Lyme, Old Lyme, Groton, and Norwich. Old Saybrook, Lyme, and Old Lyme closed despite having few, if any, pupils of color in their systems in contrast to New London where practically half of the pupils were minority. The possible recurrence of such problems was eliminated when Martin Luther King, Jr., Day became a national holiday celebrated on the third Monday in January.

### **Discrimination in Police Department**

In September 1986, I received telephone calls about discrimination against minority police officers. I wanted to know the facts, although I felt there was little I could do. For

one thing, the only ones mentioning the complaints to me were the minority officers themselves. It was after the complaints were made public that the officers began calling me. They wanted to clarify some things. If what I was hearing was factual, it looked as if the officers had a valid complaint. Nonetheless, I still was reluctant to involve myself. But then something appeared in a newspaper that took a huge chunk out of my ego. That newspaper article indicated that no one had done anything about civil rights in New London. I felt that the person quoted saying this needed to do his homework. He needed to go to the library and read *The Day* to learn what blacks in the past had done for the community. He would have discovered that the New London NAACP Branch had accomplished a great deal.

The minority police officers, with their discrimination complaints pending, were waiting the outcome of the NAACP branch election due that fall. Prior to the 1986 October meeting in which the nominating committee was to be selected, I had been receiving feelers about my availability for the presidency. Even though I had been retired now about three years, I felt the need to decline. There were other things that I had to consider that I felt were more important. It was odd that I felt that way, because in the 1960s I was employed and had very little time. I soon realized that I had made a mistake and that I should have jumped at the opportunity.

I was on the nominating committee for the 1986 fall election. William Story was nominated for president. I had no idea what to expect of him, but I called him as soon as I returned home that evening and told him, "If you make it, I will give you all the help I can." I meant that from my heart. I knew I could help him, especially in handling complaints. Story knew I was on the nominating committee and more than likely on his side. He thanked me for that offer of support. Once nominated, Story's election was a mere formality. I could sense there was no one else interested enough to oppose the committee's nomination. The Rev. Benjamin K. Watts, the young, charismatic minister of Shiloh Baptist Church, became the first vice-president; Tina Cunningham became the second vice-president, and I was voted in as the third vice-president.

Before I realized what had happened, I was in the middle of the situation involving minority policemen, who were at my door or calling me on the phone. The officers eventually approached me in a more direct manner. One said they had told Story they wanted me involved. A day or so after the officer told me that, one of the minority officers came to my house and said that they were waiting for me at the church. I had had no notice of a meeting. At the church I found another officer, Rev. Watts, and President Story. Rev. Watts made it known he was due in New Haven and he had to leave within the hour. We all reviewed the written statements and as the meeting wound down, I agreed, after being asked by Story, to prepare a statement on the case. Story wanted the statement read the first Thursday in January at the NAACP board meeting and he wanted it to be used as a press release.

When the meeting ended, it appeared that everyone was satisfied. I went home with an idea of how I would word the statement. In view of it being for public consumption, I did not include the names of the complainants and the respondent. The statement was read at the board meeting and the board voted unanimously to release it to the press. It was given to *The Day*, which promptly listed William Dittman as the respondent. It listed Frank Jarvis, Genaro Velez, and John Santiago as the complainants. I felt, because of a

possible backlash, those names should not have been printed. But the newspaper had no such concerns.

At the time of his nomination, Story had made it known he was going away for six weeks beginning in January 1987. At the board meeting in January prior to his departure, Story named Clarence Faulk as the head of the police committee. That was sort of shocking to me. Vernice Cook explained that Faulk had been head of the EEO department at the submarine base. Tina Cunningham said the secretary, Cook, should be on the committee. She said by virtue of the bylaws, the secretary was an ex-officio member of all committees. Then Selvyn Jackson, chairman of the Labor and Industry Committee, was put on because of the committee he headed. Story, by virtue of his office, was also an ex-officio member of the committee. I was excluded. I cannot recall what the reason was for naming Cunningham to the committee. I told Faulk that I wanted to be on the committee. For many reasons, I figured he would tell me I could be a part of the committee from then on. But to my surprise, Faulk left me off the committee.

On or about March 16, 1987, a police officer delivered to our secretary, Mrs. Vernice Cook, a packet containing three reports of an internal investigation written by three upper echelon officials in the New London Police Department. Mrs. Cook gave these reports to the members of the NAACP's police committee and to the complaining minority officers. The packets were marked "CONFIDENTIAL." I felt I had to have copies of those reports to read myself. One evening before March 20 I returned home to find someone had answered my prayers and there was a manila envelope on the floor containing copies of the reports. As I read the reports, I began to burn. When I went to bed that morning, I saw what was a winnable case.

I had read about a meeting set for March 20 in an article in *The Day* written by Tammerlin Drummond. The headline read "Bias Complaint Not Settled." The article quoted Chief Sloan as saying the findings were about seventy-five percent settled and would "be completed next Friday." The morning of the meeting, *The Day* carried a story by Drummond about the reports. The headline read "Racism Probe Clears Officer." I found out that the committee was to meet before the members went to the city hall meeting. When I went to city hall early, however, I was taken aback to see each committee member's automobile already there. I hurried to City Manager C. Francis Driscoll's office and asked his secretary if the meeting was in progress. She said it was and asked if I was involved. When I nodded yes, she told me to go right in. When I went in, all eyes turned upon me. I felt I was interrupting. I felt like an intruder. As I sat down, I realized the meeting was just about to end. I began to believe that when it had become known that I would be present, they had changed the meeting time. Later I discovered this was so.

I'm not saying I could have changed anything if I had been there from the start. Maybe my presence would have created an atmosphere of tension. It was difficult after that for me to continue, but I felt our complainants had to have someone they could depend on. After talking to some of the committee members that evening after the meeting, I knew something had to be done. I felt that the internal police reports should be made public. One member said that the reports were to remain confidential. Nonetheless, when Tammerlin Drummond, the *Day* reporter, told me she wanted the police reports, I told her to come to my house that evening and she would be able to read them. I asked that she

not use my name. Miss Drummond came and read the reports. That Saturday Tammy's story appeared and she had detailed the charges. Following that, there were letters to the *Day's* editor on the subject. One letter described the reports as "Hogwash." Another referred to a report as "Redneck rubbish" and blasted the NAACP for mishandling the case. Also, the Southeastern Chapter of The National Organization for Women (NOW) made it known that it was supporting the position of the minority police officers.

The NAACP presented the city with a three-part proposal that the city agreed to implement. It was as follows: The police department would conduct sensitivity training sessions among its officers, especially supervisory personnel; an administration policy statement condemning discriminatory practices within the police department would be issued; and a moratorium put on all police promotions. I thought the moratorium proposal was all right, but the sensitivity training and anti-discriminatory policy statement were suspect. They were too early in my estimation. Had NAACP approached it correctly, the sensitivity training and the policy statement would have been presented after the charges of discrimination had been resolved. In regard to the three-part proposal, *The Day* quoted Rev. Watts as saying, "We haven't gained or lost anything, but it was a place where we could have gained."

On May 27, the NAACP Police Committee met with city officials again. I tried to be prepared this time. I was going to picket city hall in support of the NAACP. A small group of us began calling ourselves the New London Coalition of Concerned Citizens. Later we added more members, but for the demonstration only four would be needed. On May 26, we spent hours stenciling placards to wear the following day. We stenciled our placards according to our individual fancies. I had no quarrel with that, so long as the placards represented our common goals. We would also hand out flyers opposing promoting an officer charged with racism and supporting the NAACP's stand. We walked slowly and deliberately as we handed out our flyers behind city hall that day. Newspaper, radio, and television personnel were on hand. After the meeting between NAACP and city officials, the moratorium was still intact. City officials were going to try the impossible. They wanted to get the complainants and respondent together to try to work something out. If that didn't work, the state would have to mediate it.

All the afternoon of July 13, the radio had been carrying a story that the moratorium on promotions would be lifted at the council meeting that Monday evening. At a NAACP police committee meeting that day at 5 p.m., President Story had had the members read a letter that he had drafted to read to the city council. It was not mistake free and I was given the job of retyping it. I hurried home as I had only an hour or less. I noticed that Story wrote several times of an agreement. There was no agreement. I pondered a while, then decided to rewrite the letter without mentioning any agreement. I gave the letter to the president outside city hall and told him about the "agreement" error. He agreed that he had mistakenly inserted that word. After all of my trouble in writing the letter, it wasn't even read. Other NAACP members at the council meeting held a small conference with the mayor and other councilors. The next thing I knew, someone opened the council door and told me the group was leaving. Outside council chambers, I learned the issue of the moratorium would not be brought up that evening.

I returned home and prepared to eat. I had not eaten since breakfast. But then Vernice Cook called around 9:45 p.m. to tell me she had talked the president into inviting

me to a meeting they had scheduled for Shiloh at 10 p.m. The city manager, council members, the mayor, and police chief would be there. I was at the church by 10. The meeting was hectic and stormy. I really had not been in such a meeting for years. The two groups broke to caucus several times. The administration contingent caucused outside on the church veranda. Reporters, who had trailed the administration officials to the church, reported the next day that there were tense arguments among city officials. We had not heard any of that. When they were meeting with us, city officials were taking a hard line. They wanted to break the moratorium. I felt the moratorium should be broken also and I told our participants how I felt about it. I told them that city officials should be allowed to break the impasse and make the promotions. If they did the right thing (promote a minority officer), we would not do anything. If the administration did the wrong thing, according to our views, we would act accordingly. Our committee rejected my idea.

Rev. Watts suggested a panel to hear the case. Each side would select a person who would hear the tapes and read the transcripts. Then both sides would submit a slate of names from which a third person would be selected. That third party would be the deciding vote that would settle the issue. I could not see how that could work. That third person was the sticking point. I could see neither side agreeing on that third party. The group decided to go along with Rev. Watts' suggestion. Both sides had until the coming Thursday to submit the name of a person to represent them. President Story called all over the state in an effort to find names of persons who might be interested in representing our side. Story settled for Earnestine Brown, a Hartford resident and former New Londoner. He presented her name on the day specified.

In a case that already had more twists and turns than a dozen pretzels, another twist had begun to take shape. One of the complainants felt he was caught in the middle. His two co-complainants were no longer involved and he felt that the NAACP committee, which was supposed to help him, had fallen short. After considering all this, and realizing his was the only active complaint, he felt he had to try to mediate a settlement alone. He came to me on the morning that the names were to be submitted for the mediation panel and said he wanted to settle and for the major credit for a settlement to go to the NAACP. Even though I opposed his attempt to settle, I went along with him since he was the one feeling the heat. President Story came by and appeared to be in complete agreement with the complainant's desire to settle. The complainant went back to the police station and talked to Chief Sloan, who hurriedly put the wheels into motion.

An announcement was made that an agreement had been worked out and that there would be a press conference at 3 p.m. at city hall the next day. At a meeting at which I received little or no backing, I finally told Driscoll to lift the moratorium. I felt that was all I could have done under the circumstances. Hearing my words, Driscoll hurriedly wrote a press release. I was given an opportunity to speak to the press. I declined. From the NAACP's point of view, there was nothing to shout about. Driscoll explained to the reporters and cameras what we had worked out. The most glaring and obvious thing about the case was that the minority police officers did not receive anything.

## **Drugs and Despair**

During the 1980s, the sale of illegal drugs devastated the New London community. Along with New London dealers, dealers from New York and other areas capitalized on

the lucrative market in our city. The arrests of young black and Puerto Rican men occurred on a regular basis. Older dealers used poor New Londoners as local peddlers. Illegal drugs were available twenty-four hours a day. I decided to research drug use in New London. I spent time with drug users. The groans, wheezes, and gurgles that emerged from drug wracked bodies nearly forced me to end my research. I spoke with Drs. Willie Coleman and Linda Smith at Care Clinic in New London. I learned from them that crack and heroin addicts undergo personality and life changes. Coleman told about the many female addicts who turned to prostitution to feed their habit. I took home a "Crack Fact Sheet" printed by the American Lung Association of Connecticut.

The knowledge I gained from street research, visits at the Care Clinic, and discussions with attorneys led me to attempt to get the NAACP to submit proposals to the General Assembly for new drug legislation for prevention and for cure. I alerted Story that I would submit proposals to the NAACP for that purpose. I submitted my report to the NAACP on May 19, 1987. I wanted NAACP aid, but I was willing to move without their assistance. I told my fellow members that drugs were ruining our young people. I proposed that the General Statutes be amended so that drug offenders would not be released from jail until they surrendered the names of dealers. I also called for longer prison terms for dealers. Users would be required to undergo treatment for drug use. After my proposal, NAACP leaders made me head of the political action committee. Ed McDonough, Police Chief Richard Kistner, State Deputy Speaker of the House William Cibes, Wanda Short, Sylvia Hemphill, Vernice Cook, and William Story were on my committee. Despite our efforts, our proposals to the state legislature died.

I eventually suggested that the New London NAACP have a more active drug committee, but some members felt it was "too dangerous." All I wanted to do was to begin a program of educating drug users. I wanted to carry out efforts to confront drug dealers by constantly carrying messages to them in our drug-ridden streets. I wanted a group carrying signs to go into the streets and let the dealers know that we wanted to take back our streets from them. The NAACP Executive Board chose not to have a drug program. To my surprise and dismay, no one, including two youngsters at this meeting, had anything to say. Only a deacon expressed any views and those were negative.

### **A Bid for the Presidency**

When I heard a rumor that President Story would take the presidency again only if no one else were interested, I decided to run. It was 1988 and I felt I could manage the organization for two years. I secured ten signatures on a petition and submitted it at the November meeting when all submissions for office were presented. As the organization's election manual called for, I submitted, in writing, a request to use the membership list for campaign purposes. Only candidates for president are allowed the privilege of doing that. The branch secretary turned down my request. I got busy trying to reach as many members as I could. I wrote a letter to *The Day* December 12, 1988. I also sent a copy of that letter to whomever I thought was a NAACP member. I mentioned in the letter that, "the NAACP does not belong to any church, or fraternity, or any other entity." And I also made it known "It does not belong to any political party." The day before the election, December 14, 1988, I sent another letter because someone had told the branch secretary that she had an obligation to let me see the list of members, which she did on the evening two days before the election. Most members got my letter after the election.



Election night, the room at the OIC building was packed. When the smoke cleared on the evening of December 15, the only thing I did was to make an admirable showing. I was on the losing end by thirteen votes. I protested the results on the grounds I had not been allowed access to the membership lists soon enough to contact the members. The state and then the national NAACP did not uphold this protest. I wasn't very enthused after that fiasco and I attended probably two more branch meetings.

## Police Hiring Requirements

In 1988, Police Chief Richard Kistner made a proposal that I thought was absurd. His proposal was that an applicant for the police department must have thirty college credits rather than just a high school diploma. I felt this was a racist and discriminatory move and that it could contravene the city's 1977 Affirmative Action Law.

The New London Coalition of Concerned Citizens, as reported in *The Day*, January 11, 1989, filed a complaint charging that the proposed police hiring practice would be unfair. To follow up, Al Garvin and I appeared before the city council on January 17. The story of that meeting was carried by *The Day* and the *Norwich Bulletin*. At that meeting, Garvin pointed out that Connecticut State Police did not require recruits to have college credits. We figured ninety percent of minority aspirants would be eliminated if the city adopted the college plan. For people fighting against the college requirement, it was a glorious city council meeting. A number of city residents, mostly white, sided with us. Mayor Eunice Waller, who is black, said the chief's proposal was too strong and, therefore, she could not support it. She cautioned her fellow councilors to be careful not to violate the concept of affirmative action. When the meeting ended, it appeared as if we had the majority of councilors on our side and that the college proposal was dead.

To maintain the momentum, I kept busy that week. I attended a meeting of New London's Equal Employment Opportunities Committee (EEO). Even though I wasn't a member, I was allowed to give my views. The committee had earlier made its opposition to the chief's plan known. So members drafted a resolution to be read at an upcoming breakfast meeting on the subject. They designated no one to introduce it, however.

On January 19, I was at the NAACP meeting trying to convince the membership to follow in the tracks of the Coalition of Concerned Citizens and the EEO Committee. The NAACP discussed the college credit proposal and no one supported it. During this week, *The Day* ran several articles on police hiring. A January 18 article carried the headline, "NL councilors criticize policy for hiring new police officers." A January 22 headline read, "NAACP formally opposes NL police hiring policy." In early January 1989, the Coalition of Concerned Citizens sent this letter to Bertha Willoughby, EEO coordinator, with a copy to Chief Kistner and the city council.

*In Re: Affirmative Action Violations. January 1989*

*Dear Ms. Willoughby,*

*As provided for in the Affirmative Action guidelines, the New London Coalition of Concerned Citizens, being an interested party in the implementation of New London's Affirmative Action Program, do complain to say:*

1. *The New London Police Department's hiring policies, which have been in effect since early 1988, are in direct conflict with the city's Affirmative Action Program.*

2. *The police department's hiring policies are designed to circumvent Presidential Executive orders; state laws; civil rights laws, and federal edicts from which the city's Affirmative Action Program and guidelines were derived.*

3. *The New London Coalition of Concerned Citizens is hereby challenging the police department's hiring policies as favoring the more fortunate by using built-in biases; as being discriminatory against minorities, and as violating the very spirit and letter of the New London Affirmative Action Program.*

We were surprised to get the following reply from Chief Kistner dated January 13th.

*Dear Mr. Bland:*

*Thank you for providing me with a copy of your recent letter to Mrs. Willoughby, E.E.O. coordinator for the City. I appreciate and share your concerns regarding the need and value of Affirmative Action in Police Hiring, something that has been lacking in New London for many years.*

*You may be interested to learn that the proposals enacted by the Personnel Board in the spring of 1988 were designed to enhance Affirmative Action and improve the situation that the City has experienced for many years. I believe you may have the misconception that these are "Police Department Hiring Policies." The Police Department does not hire and has no policies. These are the purview of the Personnel Board and Personnel Office of the City of New London.*

*Rather than being designed "to circumvent Presidential Executive Orders" as your letter indicates, they were, in fact, designed to implement the recommendations of a Presidential Commission. Similar policies elsewhere have been challenged and found not to violate E.E.O. standards or the spirit of Affirmative Action. As you are aware, under the past Affirmative Action Policies of the City, the last black officer hired was over nine years ago. A change was definitely needed and the policy changes were implemented to give me the opportunity to rectify that situation. I fear that if we return to the old policies, we will get the same results, i.e., a white police department. Such a result is undesirable in a City with New London's significant Minority population.*

*Therefore, I would ask you to support the changes rather the (sic) oppose them. They are designed to promote professionalism and increase minority representation. My conversations with representatives of Mitchell College and Mohegan Community College indicate that no minority student who is otherwise qualified is denied the opportunity to*

*attend because of lack of financial resources. I believe you were present the night this issue was discussed before the City's E.E.O. Panel. Mr. John Etienne, a member of the panel suggested that candidates be given two years to meet the 30-hour requirement as a condition of employment. Not only was this a good idea, but it would allow the candidate to use the availability of the City's Financial Aid for tuition for employees. You will recall that I accepted and supported that compromise and called upon Cpl. Charles Alloway, a member of the E.E.O. Panel and the Police Union President, to agree to same. To date he has not responded to that request. My offer of support for the proposal still stands, however.*

*In closing, let me state that I will unceasingly work to increase educational standards for our officers. Study after study has shown that the higher the education level, the better the department performs, particularly in the area of minority relations. It is in the best interests of the entire community to see Police Standards raised. I respectfully request that you carefully reconsider your position on the issue.*

*In closing, I would like to invite you to attend a breakfast that I have scheduled for January 24th, 1989, at 8:30 AM at the Radisson Hotel. I have asked Mr. Atkins Warren, Mr. Josh Liburd, and Mr. Marty Walsh of the Community Relations Service of the U.S. Department of Justice to attend. The purpose of the breakfast is to discuss the issues of Police Education requirements and their impact on the minority community in an open forum. I have also invited the E.E.O. Committee and Personnel Committee Membership to attend. Breakfast is on me. I'm sure your input would be very valuable at this session. Please R.S.V.P. with your plans to my secretary, Brenda Fleming, at 447-5262 as soon as possible so we may get a final count.*

*Yours truly,  
Richard A. Kistner Chief of Police*

Most of New London's major groups that needed to render their opinion were at the January 24 breakfast meeting. The black Justice Department officials were at the meeting to support the college plan. Black NAACP officials, even though they were charged by a membership vote to oppose the plan, were there to support it. The Hispanic community, represented by William Garcia, was supporting the plan. But the strange thing was, the city's Equal Employment Opportunities Committee (EEO) had voted to oppose it. I had a copy of the resolution and there were members of the EEO Committee present at the meeting. But no one read the resolution. Chief Kistner was destined to prevail. He had all the support. I never thought Kistner had minority interests at heart. His implementation of an Affirmative Action Program meant college credits instead of high school diplomas as a prerequisite to becoming a police officer for the City of New London.

I asked the question over and over again, "How could Kistner, or anyone else, other than a magician, hire more blacks with college credits, than blacks with high school diplomas?" The following morning, *The Day* reported that, "As of January 1, 1992, the 30-credit requirement, the equivalent of one year of college, will be a pre-condition for

new officers, and as of January 1, 1994, two years, or 60 credits.” The article also stated that everyone who attended the meeting was in agreement. I was not. I tried one more thing. I wrote a letter of protest to Chief Kistner and I tried to get a delay in the policy’s implementation. I stated that 1993 or 1994 would be an acceptable starting year, although, as far as I was concerned, no starting year was acceptable. I figured, as long as I was going to lose the immediate battle, I needed time to try to overturn the policy, or at least to modify it. As far as Kistner was concerned, I never expected him to change anything. I just wanted him to know that, as a member of the Coalition of Concerned Citizens, regardless of how the Hispanic or NAACP leadership felt, I was not satisfied.

The Chief had talked over and over about “professionalism” within his police department. He thought college would have ensured that. I could have cared less about the “professionalism” issue. I was interested in non-discriminatory practices in the recruitment and hiring of minorities, especially blacks. Requiring college backgrounds as opposed to high school diplomas was certainly discriminatory because of the minorities’ limited access to higher education during the Reagan/Bush Administrations. I was all for college courses after an officer was hired, but even that depended on how long the recruit was given to get the necessary credits.

### A Final Blow

The last of three incidents that caused me to realize my protests against the City of New London were just about over occurred in 1990. I found myself in confrontation with leaders in the Hispanic community. After almost four years of running battles with black leadership over civil rights, I felt no urge to confront Hispanic leaders and, in fact, had worked with them on matters such as the police hiring practices. I had become so disenchanted with the NAACP after all of those quarrels and failures that I walked away. But in an attempt to remain involved, I decided to form another group in 1990. With some of the members of the Coalition of Concerned Citizens, I formed the Area Coalition for Truth (ACT). ACT set out to attempt to repeal that thirty-college-credit requirement. We appealed to the New London Equal Employment Opportunities Committee and the city personnel board. We were not successful, but we did not fail altogether. We succeeded in getting the personnel board to delay the implementation of the college requirement for an unspecified period of time. We set out to raise funds for a publicity campaign by sending out this letter.

*“As a member of the Area Coalition for Truth, I am aware of two certain facts. The last black policeman was hired in 1979. The last black firefighter was hired in 1978. Now I’m not much of a mathematician, but I know the decade of the 1980s was not good to blacks in neither the New London fire nor the police departments. Ten years, mind you, is a decade. But I’m speaking of 1978 and 1979. That, mathematically speaking, is over a decade. In its 1977 resolution concerning Affirmative Action and equal employment opportunities, the City Council had this to say:*

*Whereas, the acceptance of this equal employment opportunity principle does not end with the sheer prohibition of discriminatory practices but rather the City of New London, as well as its vendors, suppliers, contracting agencies, contractors, sub-contractors, etc.*

*recognizing its obligation to develop practical plans for specific steps to be taken to achieve more fully the goal of equal opportunity employment and training of minorities and women in jobs.*

*I dare say, I interpret those underlined words to include policemen and firemen. On January 24, 1989, a majority of citizens, meeting with city administrators, including the police chief and members of the U.S. Justice Department, consented to the idea of potential police recruits having at least one year of college instead of a high school diploma. That majority consented to a plan that was the death knell to the hiring of blacks and other minorities. The time has come to roll back the clock. The one-year of college has not been negotiated into official city hiring policy. What was consented to on January 24, 1989, must be repealed. That statement is evidenced, and proven by the fact that not one black policeman, be he a high school graduate or a Rhodes Scholar, has been hired by the New London Police Department in over 10 years. What more proof is needed to show that two years of college, prior to applying to become a New London police officer, is discriminatory?"*

We discussed ways of publicizing our cause. One member suggested that we run a full-page ad in *The Day*. I thought that was a wonderful idea and we adopted it. But that person never contributed a cent and few organizations we sent letters to responded. Realizing that we were not going to get the proper responses, I wrote ACT members the following:

*According to organizational responses, I guess it's safe to say: THERE ARE NO LOCAL RACIAL PROBLEMS. A full-page ad costs approximately \$1600.00. As of January 10, 1990, individuals have donated a total of \$725.00. A half page ad can be for \$943.74. I recommend we go with the latter.*

It was a hurtful thing to realize that nineteen organizations were contacted and only two felt they should contact us. The Coalition of Concerned Citizens and the Muslims were the only interested groups. That was a sad commentary because a few of ACT's members were leaders of other organizations.

The half-page ad ran on February 5, 1990, in *The Day*. That newspaper, a few days later, supported our position editorially. City Manager C. Francis Driscoll was quoted as saying, "I'm still on their side and I get the point (of the ad)." The advertisement had wide coverage, but we knew it would take time to see some results. Knowing that, all we could do was to bide our time then follow up with other publicity. Things went smoothly in the days following the ad. We had floated the issue before the public and some positives occurred. We had the support of newspapers and others. The city manager had spoken, as did the chief of police. But on March 11, 1990, our efforts turned to bitterness. At least mine did. On that date, I was informed that the Afro American/Latino Coalition, formed in October 1989, had taken on the city's hiring issue. And the group was scheduled to meet with the city council March 12. I could hardly believe what I was being told. Hardly a month had passed since we ran the half-page ad. Now the issue was being taken over by another group. It was a bombshell because no one had contacted us

beforehand. I was asked to join this group. We had been usurped. That meant others would be spokespersons for a cause that we had publicly aired in February. That was not fair. Seeing no way out, I consented to be a member of that other coalition with a resounding, YES! We had but one issue at that time, but ACT'S involvement was made to disappear.

## My Tax Revolt

In 1992, I began my stand against "Taxation without Representation." I didn't know where it was going to lead and I did not want to embarrass myself though I knew there was that possibility. Nonetheless, the thought of New London not hiring a black fireman in fourteen years and hiring but one black policeman in thirteen years caused me to say, "No More Taxes." And I stopped paying mine. New London advertised itself as being "An equal opportunity employer." It may have seemed that way to others, but for blacks, it was not. In February 1992, I wrote a letter to the editor of *The Day* about taxes and city employment practices. The paper headlined it "Black New Londoners should protest." I wrote a lot of letters on the subject of city hiring practices. I wrote one, dated September 19, 1992, titled "Contentment will lead to resentment," when my blood was boiling.

*It's a strange phenomenon we have here in this city. If anyone took the time to study it, the findings would and should be a cause for alarm. I am speaking of progress for black males.*

*The phenomenon is that progress for black males is measured in reverse in this city for one reason or the other. To prove the point, one has only to look at the obvious. The year 1978 saw the hiring of the first and last black firefighters. In that year, because of the threat of losing funds coming into the city, our locality felt it had to hire blacks for the fire department. Four were eventually hired. Then one left for other employment. That left three. Those three are still there, 14 years later. Others have been hired, but not one black.*

*At one time or another, prior to 1980, black males totaled nine in the police department. That number has now dwindled by two-thirds. In January 1987, an editorial in *The Day*, titled: "Let affirmative action begin in New London," stated, "Today, New London's police force of 60 has only four blacks, one Hispanic and one Pacific Islander in its ranks. With a racial population of 25 percent, this situation is intolerable."*

*Today, the total of black police males is three. There soon will be two. But during the last month, *The Day* editorially praised the departing city manager for his hiring policies for the past twenty-some-odd years.*

*The *Day*'s editorialist's head must have been buried in the sand when public meetings were being held concerning the lack of minority hiring. And our so-called black leaders, apparently content with the lack of commitment by the city to hire black males, need to be reminded that contentment leads to resentment. And resentment leads to Watts and L. As.*

I knew some of my letters were harsh. I intended them to be. Racism is harsh. I see mayhem and murder as possibly being harsher. But the recipients of racism have something planted in their minds that probably will never be forgotten. It's a difficult thing to overcome.

My decision not to pay any real estate taxes led to conversations with the tax collector and a sheriff that caused me to shift from what I originally had set out to do. I now agreed to pay a certain amount monthly. The third week in September 1996, however, I received a certified letter from the sheriff. It said that the arrangement to pay monthly was overridden by a policy of the city council and that I must pay all back taxes by November 30, 1996, or my property would be auctioned off May 9, 1997. I didn't know whether I would attend the bidding or stay home and wait to hear who the new owner was. But an angel came to my aid. In April, I received checks from an anonymous donor for the entire amount. The taxes were paid and the real estate saga was behind me. But the issue of regarding minorities in the police and fire departments remained.

When I began writing in the early 1980s I had nothing except joy and pleasantness to look forward to. I knew I had to do a lot of research about things that I barely remembered. But in concluding these writings, I find I had to do it in anger. Back in our local NAACP days, the enemy was segregation and discrimination. But since the decade of the 1960s, other events caused me to wonder who was the enemy.

# APPENDIX

## Dr. Jane W. Torrey's Story

In the 1960s, accepting the call for the New London Branch NAACP presidency, I wondered where my help was going to come from. I knew I could depend on certain individuals to do what time permitted them to. And I also knew, from past observations, certain individuals desired to be in the know, but only as observers. They wanted to occupy key positions, but had little or no desire to be active. The few I had confided in, basically knew what I wanted. They knew I wanted to have an organization that would get things done. And to get things done, an organization needed super people.

I wish I could say how Jane W. Torrey became a part of our mix. As far as I can remember, I had never heard her name. If any of the other key people were aware of her presence, they kept it hidden from me. She certainly wasn't part of the group that made up the executive board in my first presidential term. But it didn't take long after the 1963 installation of officers for me to become aware of her. Jane Torrey became one of those super people. She was one of the few who went far above and beyond the call of duty.

She doesn't know it, but I carried a small newspaper photo of her everywhere I went. I was proud of Jane Torrey, and I wanted everyone to see who was on our side. That picture was printed because she had been elected to some high position in a psychologists' organization. The newspaper said she had earned her doctorate at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania. At the time she became involved with our NAACP, Dr. Torrey was an associate professor of psychology at Connecticut College. It wasn't that we hadn't had college professors involved. We had plenty of them. Duane Lockard, for example, was a professor who at one time had also been a state senator. But Dr. Torrey was a woman whereas all of the other deeply involved college professors were males. And she wasn't afraid to stick her neck out. That's the reason I was proud of her. Dr. Torrey left the branch on several occasions to travel to Europe and South America to conduct studies. In 1966, I believe it was, she went to Atlanta, Georgia, and taught a semester at Spelman College, a black women's school. Dr. Torrey returned to the NAACP branch each time she came back to New London.

*Here are some of her memories of her activities with the local NAACP.*

### **Picketing Woolworth's**

It was my first experience with picketing. If I felt funny about it, it was only for a minute. It was exciting and fun. Not that we did anything except carry signs. We made no attempt to stop anyone from entering. We understood that was illegal. Some black women were told our reason for the action, and I recall their going in anyway. I think the manager came out to disclaim any racism on his part. We understood that. The action was against the whole company, because in a Woolworth's somewhere, there had been a sit-in. This seemed to him unfair. It was unfair to him, but we figured it would get him to complain to his national Woolworth's headquarters, or at least let them know of the event.



## **March on Washington, 1963**

As soon as I heard about the march, I was determined to join others from New London. I recall being told by more than one colleague on campus, that it was unwise, and it would be dangerous. With all those (Black) people that were expected, there would be violence. I scoffed at such fears. The marchers had no reason to be violent. Somehow I didn't expect problems with the police in Washington either. I wondered if KKK types might try to cause trouble. But I thought, (perhaps naively), that the police would control them if any showed up. I hadn't given any thought to the Nazis.

I was in Washington for the International Congress of Psychology the week preceding the march. The day before the march, I had gone to NAACP headquarters, in a black section of town, to get a hat with "NAACP" on it. I thought, along with others, that organizational presence was important. While I looked for the office, I saw some Nazis parading in front of a radio station with signs calling Bayard Rustin a Communist. (I didn't know he was one at the time, but I later learned he was one of the main organizers of the march. Only recently I learned he actually had once been a member of the Communist Youth Organization.)

The morning of the march, I walked from my hotel down to the station to meet the New London crowd, hoping I'd find them. The street was empty, except for police stationed here and there. They were afraid of "trouble" like my Connecticut College colleagues. I found the New London folks, despite the huge crowds. Joining the others, we walked to the Washington Monument where the march was to start. Two things I recall from the platform, where they made the announcements, (1) They announced that W. E. B. DuBois had died in Ghana a day or two before. (2) Peter Paul and Mary sang "Blowing in the Wind." Finally we started walking down the avenue toward the Lincoln Memorial. Nobody was on the sidewalk except water trucks and a few hawkers. No gawkers. Everybody there was "in" the action. The singing was tremendous, especially the Battle Hymn of the Republic. It was not a perfectly appropriate song, but it was a real rouser. Linwood expressed pleasure that Mahalia Jackson was on the program. I hadn't heard of her at that time. I learned much later that the only women on the program were singers. Even the male speakers' wives were excluded from the platform.

We were instructed to keep with our group and to stand in the woods about where the Vietnam Memorial is now. We couldn't see the Lincoln Memorial, nor could we hear clearly what was said. There were speakers all around and they interfered with each other so nothing was coherent. I moved away from the group for a time, following a voice saying "I have a dream" over and over. That was all I got of the show, but I knew it was a good one. (The only trouble was that, not being in front of a TV I didn't appreciate the extent of the crowd. I heard details from other people, and later got a record of the proceedings.)

## **Voter Registration**

The chapter had a notice from Roy Wilkins calling us to a voter registration drive. The nominations had not been made then, but it must have seemed clear that Lyndon Johnson was a better candidate than Barry Goldwater, who was expected to be the Republican nominee. At the time, voter registration occurred only at city hall and only during a two-hour period, once a month. The law actually made this a minimum opportunity, but

the registrars interpreted it to mean maximum, that anyone who got there late had to wait another month. I remember a man running up the steps only a minute or two after the appointed closing time, and being refused.

Our plan was to go from house to house in black neighborhoods with notices of the next registration period. I recruited students and friends and drove them to the targeted area. The first thing I learned was, there were no all-black neighborhoods, aside from a block or two on Hempstead Street. Everywhere else, even Belden and West Coit, were mixed. The second thing I learned was, few people who came to the door knew who lived near them. I had expected to be able to find which doors were open to black residents. (We, of course, gave our notices to everyone and urged them to register.) We were gratified to find that the registrars at city hall were amazed at the numbers who showed up, and a majority of those were black.

We soon got hold of city maps showing all buildings. I forgot who gave them to us, but they made it much easier to keep track of houses that had been covered. We also had the registration lists, so we didn't waste time with people who were already registered. I had felt some urgency, even in January, but I learned later that we were ahead of most NAACP branches, even though we started a little later. We kept at it, right up to the deadline, and I figured that we at least doubled the black registration in the city. That was the year of the Mississippi Summer. They were working on voter registration there, too. I did not contemplate going there, telling myself I had a job to do in New London.

1964 was the only year I ever went to the NAACP national convention. It was the first year they were able to meet in Washington, because, before that, they wouldn't have been allowed in the hotels. My main memory was our silent sidewalk march to surround the justice department building while a representative went in to work on Bobby Kennedy to do something about the missing three civil rights workers in Mississippi. It was hopeless, of course, but you have to do something.

### **Fair Housing in Connecticut**

I don't remember which years we worked on fair housing legislation, but it was at least three sessions of the General Assembly. The first time, they limited coverage, by exemption, to five-family, owner-occupied structures. Later they reduced the exemption to three-family structures. I spent a lot of time in the Capitol those years. Once a number of us "lobbyists" gathered in the office of the Secretary of State, Ella Grasso. She was favorable to our bills, and her help was valuable. When we asked if we should see the governor, someone said: "If we inform Ella of the issues, she'll tell the governor what to think."

"We" were NAACP representatives. The first year, there was no state organization, only a "New England Regional" one. I joined the effort to create a state body because I was convinced it could speak more effectively to the Connecticut legislature. It wasn't easy, however. There were entrenched interests in the regional. Most of the chapters were in Connecticut and the president of the regional, at that time, was from Massachusetts. The last time I worked on fair housing for the state NAACP, we were much better organized, having lots of meetings in New Haven. The state AFL-CIO was very helpful.

Once we had the law down to two-unit buildings, we tested it in New London. I tried to rent an apartment on Jay Street. The woman on the second floor had the responsibility

for renting it on behalf of the owner. She had refused a black family, but agreed I could have it. We went at once to the police to ask them to arrest her, since discrimination was a criminal offense. The policeman who took my testimony was a motorcycle cop who wasn't much on the typewriter. He accepted me as a typist for my own testimony. We had to get the State Civil Rights Commission to force the prosecutor to take it up.

He was very reluctant. He also failed to notify me of the trial, but Art Greene, the most effective state investigator, kept on it and notified us when to go to Norwich for the trial. The prosecutor was probably hoping for a mistrial for lack of evidence. The defendant was really only an agent, so it wasn't exactly fair to hold her responsible. The owner was certainly the guilty party, but we had nothing on him. The trial ended in a mistrial because at least some of the jury sympathized with the defendant. We were told to consider it a pretty good outcome, even though the prosecutor nolle'd the case. We hoped it put the fear of the state into somebody.

### Looking Back on the Movement as a Whole

I've been reading a history of the civil rights movement and it strikes me that it had limitations we (fortunately) didn't recognize at the time. Reading of the Freedom Rides and Marches that challenged segregation in the South, I can understand now why it was naïve to expect any kind of significant concessions, or good faith negotiations with Southern authorities. The authorities themselves had not the power to change things. They owed their authority to ingrained notions of the meaning of whiteness and blackness.

Racism is deeply built into our society. It goes far beyond conscious individual prejudices. It is deep in our cultural psyche. Everyone's self-understanding includes their membership in social and racial groups. More importantly, most people's actual position in society confirms their prejudices. We all know that whites *are* richer and better educated than blacks. They can live in places where blacks cannot. They take their privileges so for granted that they cannot see them *as* special privileges and, therefore, can believe that measures like affirmative action, which are designed to reduce the effects of privilege, actually discriminate against whites.

All these considerations tell me that if the civil rights movement did not accomplish equality in a few years, equality was too much to expect without extensive changes in the social structure. There have been a few changes for the more privileged blacks. I recall Linwood remarking that blacks are allowed to have headaches in TV commercials. It is hard to remember that before 1960, there were virtually no black faces on TV, no programs with black actors other than an occasional housemaid, and certainly no black female judges in crime dramas. These cosmetic changes in the public media give a very false impression of change in black life, though they may help to ease an occasional case of integration because it no longer seems strange as it once did to have a black secretary or neighbor or state representative.

The fact that changes can't be accomplished overnight does not mean that any of the civil rights efforts should not have been done. Progress will take time, but time is not enough. Despite the failure to desegregate Birmingham overnight, the uproar there did pave the way for the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which in turn had some effect on segregation. More effect will take more work, and many kinds of work, including some

that provokes violence, like what happened in Birmingham. The difference between Little Rock and Birmingham was that in Little Rock the federal troops, bristling with guns, came in forcing the Negro students into high school. Permanent integration, however, depended on citizens. In Birmingham, the public demonstrations preceded federal intervention because, at that time, the federal law was not clearly behind integration, and therefore, the Kennedys had an excuse not to send in troops. Integration there had to wait upon the Civil Rights Act of 1964. However, federal force, together with local action, were both necessary.

*Those are the memories and reflections of Dr. Jane Willa Torrey*

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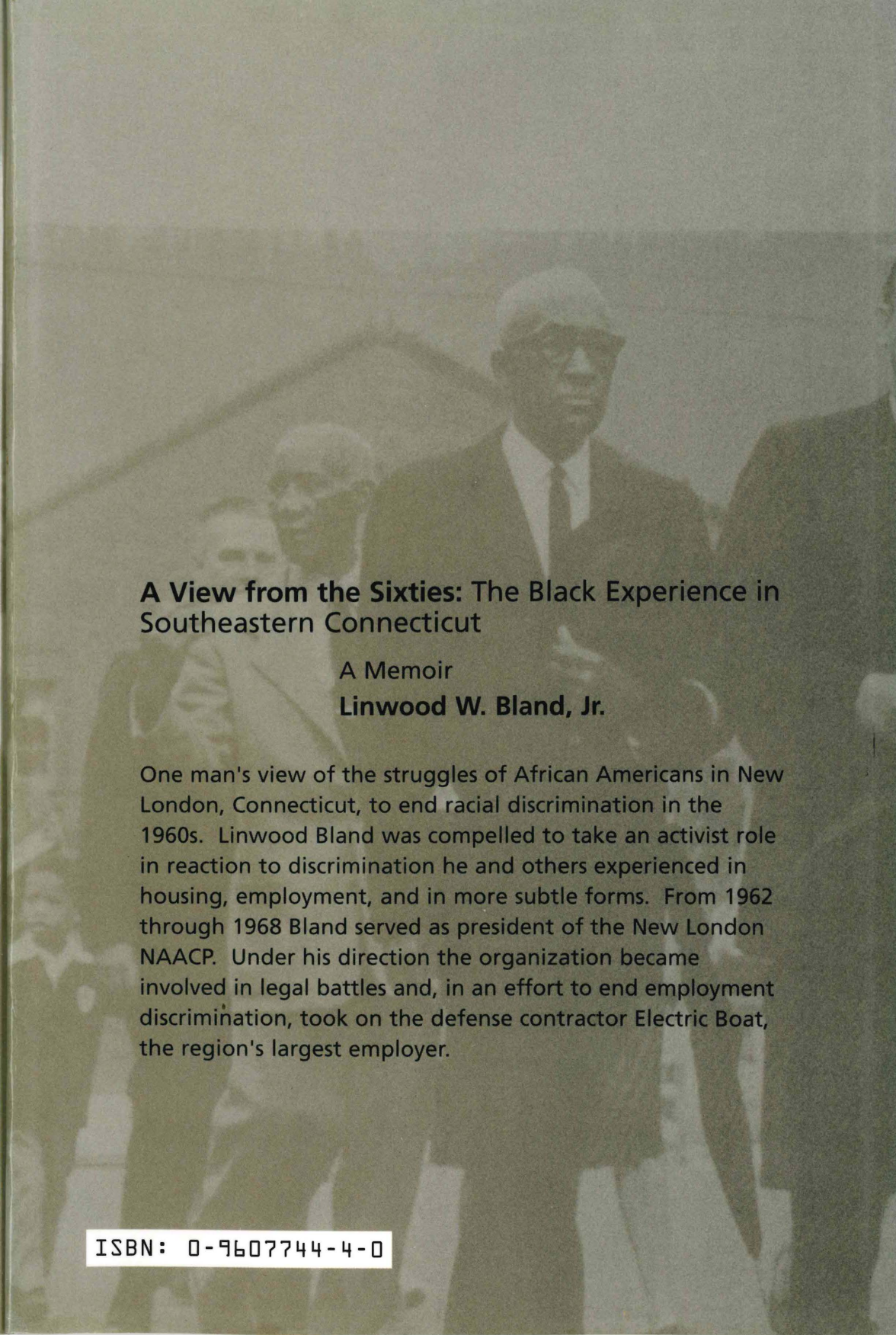
*Cover Photo:* March of mourners, September 20, 1963, in memory of four young girls who died in Birmingham, Alabama, church bombing. Linwood Bland leads procession up State Street, followed by Rev. A.A. Garvin, Rev. Richard Campbell (barely visible) Rev. Jack Madry, Rev. James McDougal, Deacon Otis Brown, and others. *[New London Public Library]*

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The New London County Historical Society, Inc.  
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## **A View from the Sixties: The Black Experience in Southeastern Connecticut**

A Memoir

**Linwood W. Bland, Jr.**

One man's view of the struggles of African Americans in New London, Connecticut, to end racial discrimination in the 1960s. Linwood Bland was compelled to take an activist role in reaction to discrimination he and others experienced in housing, employment, and in more subtle forms. From 1962 through 1968 Bland served as president of the New London NAACP. Under his direction the organization became involved in legal battles and, in an effort to end employment discrimination, took on the defense contractor Electric Boat, the region's largest employer.

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